

Extinction at the Cherry Lane Theatre

BY JASON CLARK ON FEBRUARY 18TH, 2010 AT 2:00 PM IN THEATER



Stop me if you've heard this one: Two college buddies reunite for a night of debauchery and soul-searching and learn that life has taken them in two different directions. Okay, so Gabe McKinley's *Extinction*, coming to the Cherry Lane by way of Los Angeles, doesn't quite defy a cliché-strewn description. Nor does it fully escape the comparisons it will inevitably earn to the work of modern playwrights Neil LaBute and Adam Rapp, who have become the de facto captains of straight manchildren. But in this terrific production, directed with well-calibrated liveliness by Wayne Kasserman, even the clichés have a whiff of freshness about them.

Max (Michael Weston) has made a fortune on pharmaceuticals, while his old NYU pal Fin (James Roday, of TV's *Psych*) is a newly married librarian with no dough and few prospects. After reliving old glories in their Atlantic City hotel room (with shout-outs to Blue and Gold Bar and the Wetlands among other places) and some harmless wrestling and machismo comparison (homoerotic undertones abound), Max and Fin spend most of their time busting each other's balls and cracking one-liners, many of them class-A zingers that suggest Neil Simon with a gutter mind. ("Burlesque...the best thing to happen to fat chicks since black men," quips Max at one

point.) As one can guess, Max is the more Neanderthal of the duo, with nothing but partying on his mind, with Fin the pinnacle of good intentions gone to seed. Their jealousies and resentments begin to boil over, and the arrival of a pair of prostitutes (Amanda Detmer and Stefanie E. Frame) turns the night into a drug-fueled free-for-all.

Extinction roils toward inevitable revelations from all parties, and its final third begins to lag, but what keeps this piece firmly glued together is its marvelously chosen cast. Detmer and Frame take potentially device-ridden characters and give them some pointed reality. Weston, with his wild eyes and wiry energy, deftly makes Max a sympathetic reptilian, not merely the mouthpiece for male douchery. And Roday is something of a revelation here. A few pounds heavier and with a "taint brush" mustache his TV persona would not endure, he truly lives in the skin of this polite sad sack's existence. If *Psych* ever goes the way of this play's title, he's got a home on the stage whenever he wants it.

Extinction is now playing at the Cherry Lane Theatre (38 Commerce St) in New York City and continues until March 14th. Schedule: Tue at 7pm, Wed-Sat at 8pm, Sun at 7pm.