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## A Lie of the Mind

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By Michael Lazan

***“Rugged and sensitive, powerful and weak, Nielsen does not shy away from any of this complex character's levels. He is an actor to watch, and perfect for a Shepard play.”***

What an audacious proposition: a single small company with a tiny little theatre presenting all 45 of Sam Shepard's plays over the course of a few years. *A Lie of the Mind*, which won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play in 1986, is a passionate, poetic, and lumpy tale of two "white trash" families. They are ripped apart by a severe incident of abuse by a rough-hewn man named Jake against his vulnerable wife, Beth. As the play progresses, you begin to feel a strange sympathy for Jake, and the couple seem, oddly, to reconcile. Awards aside, it's not Shepard's best play (it's certainly too long), but the intensity, the verisimilitude, the guts of the play can be riveting.

Give credit to the company for making this an exciting evening. Performing with very little in the way of a set, director Kathy Curtiss' actors are amped up and focused and leave plenty of room for humor. Shepard's poeticism is harmonized with a guttural Western realism.

The centerpiece is Curtis Nielsen's frightening, jagged, soulful Jake, who brings an undercurrent of tension to every scene. Rugged and sensitive, powerful and weak, Nielsen does not shy away from any of this complex character's levels. He is an actor to watch, and perfect for a Shepard play.

Equally as memorable is Thomas Francis Murphy as the cranky, hilarious Baylor, Beth's father. Will Schneider demonstrates a good deal of ready rage as Mike, Beth's brother. Susan Capra, as Baylor's naive wife, is spot-on and funny. Freida Lipp, as Jake's mother, has a world-weariness that commands attention. Adrian O'Donnell's comic precision and freedom are intriguing to watch, as Frankie, Jake's brother. His sister, Sally, dynamically played by Ali Costine, is wonderfully sly and redemptive. And Ana Podolack completes the family chain, showing beauty in passion and range as Beth, arguably the most challenging of all Shepard's female roles.

*"The Twisted backwoods Romeo-Juliet dysfunctional family tale, Lie of the Mind, is one of Shepard's most difficult dramas. Nevertheless Curtis Nielsen's physically guttural Jake rises to the Shepard's poetry."*

*- Douglas Singleton, L-Magazine*



Presented by the Michael Chekhov Theatre Company  
at the Big Little Theatre, 141 Ridge St., NYC.