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A 'COUPLE' WORTH THE COMMITMENT

By FRANK SCHECK

THEATER REVIEW

Rating: ★★☆☆

June 23, 2008 --

IN her last play, "Hunting and Gathering," Brooke Ber man explored the romantic confusion of a group of 20-somethings. With "A Perfect Couple," she's moved on and up - proving, just as entertainingly, that 30-somethings aren't any better at love.



Annie McNamara and Dana Eskelson portray two of the 30-somethings in the play's fine ensemble cast.

The couple in question is Isaac (James Waterston) and Amy (Dana Eskelson), who've been on and off for the past 15 years. Now, about to hit the big 4-0, they've decided - well, Amy has decided, and the passive Isaac is going along with her - that it's time to get married despite their many differences.

This will leave their best friend, Emma (Annie McNamara), in the lurch, as she steadfastly refuses to commit, engaging instead in a string of failed affairs with mostly younger men. ("I've been really busy," she explains.)

During a long weekend at the couple's country house, things go awry when Amy discovers that Isaac and Emma once spent a weekend together 10 years ago without informing her. Declaring that the two were clearly having an "emotional affair," she's ready to call off the marriage.

Watching all this with bemusement is their neighbor, Josh (Elan Moss-Bachrach), a recent college grad who has no idea what he's going to do with the rest of his life.

The playwright displays a gift for incisive characterizations and dialogue that's both amusing and poignant.

Says Amy, desperate to get pregnant, in all seriousness, "Women who don't have babies go insane." And Emma confesses, "Sometimes I think the loneliness will kill me. But in the morning, it always passes."

"A Perfect Couple" isn't without fault. Like so many other recent plays, it has unnecessary thought-revealing monologues where dialogue would have served more naturally, and its projected scene titles seem a bit cutesy.

But this brief work, well directed by Maria Mileaf and beautifully acted by the ensemble, unerringly captures the confusions that bedevil even the most seemingly secure relationships.

A PERFECT COUPLE

DR2, 103 E. 15th St.; (212) 239-6200. Through July 12.

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