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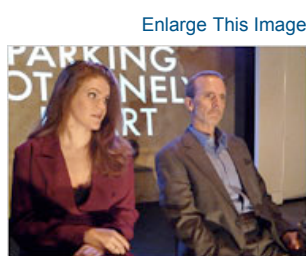
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THEATER REVIEW | 'PARKING LOT LONELY HEART'

Escort-Hiring Millionaire Says Sex Is Not His Objective

By NEIL GENZLINGER
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An awful lot of scene changes and one overused plot device keep Colin McKenna's "Parking Lot Lonely Heart" from achieving the escalating tension it's going for. But one particularly scalding performance helps cover the blemishes.



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Lillian Wright and John Greenleaf in Colin McKenna's play.

Regarding that plot device, let's just say that if the proportion of real-life men who hire prostitutes intending only to talk to them is anything like that of stage and screen characters, practically no one is actually engaging in sex for money. The fellow doing the hiring here, Mickey (John Greenleaf), can afford it: he was once hit by a city bus, and the financial settlement left him a millionaire.

The prostitute, Louise (Lillian Wright), who prefers "escort," is of course skeptical, and the resulting exchanges as Mickey tries to convince her of his intentions are so familiar that they almost kill the play before it begins. Eventually the real point shows up: Mickey's teenage daughter, Emma (Jamie Proctor), a messed-up dropout who lives on the streets and spends her time getting high.

Craig Lee Thomas, under Philip Emeott's direction, gives an attention-grabbing performance as Emma's boyfriend, Larry, tender enough to be protective of Emma but tough enough to come after Mickey with a baseball bat when the couple need drug money. It's too bad he has the smallest part in the play; you end up wanting to see more of him.

Mr. McKenna sabotages himself with scenes that are too short to allow momentum to build. A bigger budget might allow for transitions that don't seem so clunky, but this production, a world premiere by the Boomerang Theater Company, is limited by a sparse set (a necessity, perhaps, because the play is running in repertory with two others, Tennessee Williams's "Summer and Smoke" and Eric Overmyer's "Native Speech," in the modest Center Stage, NY theater).

As for the story, despite the cliché at the play's core, Mr. McKenna does just what you

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want: sets up ominous dynamics that, at midplay, he could take in any number of directions. Is Louise a surrogate for Emma? Has Mickey been overly influenced by the [John Fowles](#) novel "The Collector"? There are so many juicy possibilities that where Mr. McKenna ultimately goes with the story may feel unsatisfying; more interesting choices were available.

"Parking Lot Lonely Heart" continues through Dec. 20 at Center Stage, NY, 48 West 21st Street, Manhattan; (212) 501-4069, [theatermania.com](#).

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