

READER

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LOS ANGELES'S FREE WEEKLY

What's Wrong With This Picture? The casting is right. The set and lighting are effective. Stuart Damon's direction is tight and thoughtful. So it must be Donal Margulies' play that's a bit askew. It's a Jewish domestic comedy in the manner of Woody Allen. We enter on the final day of mourning for Shirley (Phoebe Dorin), who choked to death on a tough piece of moa-shoo pork. Gathered together are her husband Mort (Allan Miller), son Artie (James Stein), and Mort's sister (Patti Deutsch) and parents (Sandy Kenyon and Lillian Adams). The family interactions are very funny. Adams is especially good as the archetypal Jewish mother-in-law. But Margulies' attempt to complicate the plot by having Shirley return from the dead to "help straighten-out the picture" is a step in the wrong direction. Her return, all pasty-faced and ice-cold, converts the simple situation-comedy into a morbid drama that defies explanation. (Reviewed by Ken Blais.) Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Bl., Van Nuys, (818) 780-2240. Thurs-Sats at 8, Suns at 2 and 7. Thursday evenings feature invited guest experts leading post-performance discussions on "out-of-body" experiences. Closes March 20.