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THEATER REVIEW

'Out of the Blue'

■ MORTALITY ON MIND OF MEDNICK HERO AT LOST STUDIO.

By David C. Nichols, Special to The Times

Don't be too hard on Gary, the failed actor who serves as playwright Murray Mednick's sounding board in "Out of the Blue" at the Lost Studio. C'mon, he's faced with his dying mother's life support system. This fourth installment of Mednick's "The Gary Plays" sets its Everyschnook hero (a perfectly cast Lee Kissman) musing on mortality in post-Katrina New Orleans.

A helicopter ride and hell's gates jockey with the hospice where Mama Bean (Tina Preston) and stepfather Daddy O (Hugh Dane) wait on the abstract set by Jeffrey Atherton, Jason Adams and Alicia Hoge. Those familiar with previous entries will recall nonlinear jumps, repeated phrases and existential gestures, and so goes this Padua Playwrights presentation.

If the iconoclastic wordplay remains an acquired taste, director Guy Zimmerman's idiomatic take savors the flavor. Ann Closs-Farley's costume designs offer tart comment — as in Mama Bean's yeasty fright wig and Daddy O's post-Stepin Fetchit garb — and composer Don Preston's sound and Dan Reed's lighting are suitably surreal.

The actors manage their absurdist duties with aplomb. Kissman radiates nascent despair as Gary, and Preston's raucous deadpan and Dane's curt resonance solidly register. Mark Adair-Rios is a suave angel of death, while Gray Palmer and Mary C. Greening are sardonically pert choristers.

Niamh McCormally as a dead junkie and Andy Hopper as Gary's late son make strong impressions, though reliance on past themes is one of Mednick's weaknesses. The emotional stakes and cultural overview are opaque, and witty self-awareness often

becomes precocious indulgence. Still, a fifth "Gary Play" is in the works, and though detractors may wish to pull the plug, "Out of the Blue" should satisfy Mednick cultists.

"Out of the Blue," Lost Studio, 130 S. La Brea Ave., Los Angeles. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Nov. 4. Adult audiences. \$20. (323) 933-6944.

Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes.

