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A MULTI-RACIAL BEACH PLAY FOR THE SOUL

Passage Theatre presents Adrienne Dawes's *Teen Dad*



An Nichols | Sep 21, 2026 | In **Theater** | 3 minute read



From left: Walter DeShields, Morgan Charéce Hall, and Jade Cox in Passage Theatre's 'Teen Dad'. (Photo by Scott Miller.)

Imagine being stuck on vacation with your new love interest, your 15-year-old kid, your slacker ex, and their new partner. That's the premise of *Teen Dad* by Adrienne Dawes, getting its world premiere at Trenton's Passage Theatre through

October 11, 2026. It's the charming Gen X/elder Millennial comedy you never knew you needed, with a smart script mixing popular 1990s tropes with current sensibilities while also digging into racial trauma, police brutality, and family dynamics. It's a multi-racial beach play for the soul.

Directed by C. Ryanne Domingues and Richard Bradford, the show is an intelligent yet fun emotional pressure cooker, starting as a slice-of-life comedy about a Black family on vacation in a majority-white neighborhood, then shifting to explore ethnic identity, rotating partnerships, and generational trauma.

Meet the families

Teen Dad surrounds the ongoing antagonistic connection between high-school frenemies, the emotionally controlled Tanya (Morgan Charéce Hall) and the underemployed musician Tom (Zachary Valdez). Their teenage one-night stand results in a wise-beyond-her-years goth teen, Abby (Jade Cox). They share the same vacation beach house with their current partners: John, Tanya's "chill" older boyfriend (Walter DeShields), and Alisha, Tom's insecure younger girlfriend (Victoria Wallace). It's basically *Reality Bites,* but with melanin.

The multifaceted characters overlap in personae and experiences. Each of the adults undergoes stages of arrested development, forcing the actual child into hyper-maturity. Both Tanya and Alisha clearly lowered their dating standards for relationship stability, while Tanya and John overcompensate with overly mature facades. Tanya and Tom revert to adolescence while forcing Abby into the position of post-adolescent parent.

A strong production

This fun yet self-aware production showcases the synchronicity between the actors, the script, and the directing. The strong cast's natural chemistry and tactile comfort sell the script's constantly twisting relationships. DeShields and Hall (both Barrymore winners) stand out, and Hall's electric connection with Valdez joins high energy and character depth from Cox and Wallace. But my favorite aspects of the performance are the directing team's hilariously silent off-stage patio bits and numerous visual inserts.

Dirk Durossette's scenic design structurally recreates a Santa Fe-style beach house complete with outdoor patio. Bless Rudisell's enthusiastic lighting design highlights the script's surrealistic portions, including the Partridge Family-style rock session. Quinn Collins's sound design is an unseen character, from the ocean waves to police sirens. Anthony Domingues did a great job as fight consultant, especially with simulated police attacks, and Sean McArthur serves as intimacy director.

Working out the kinks

The production may have some kinks to smooth out. On opening night, the house did not open until 7:05pm, because the cast was rehearsing new blocking. Some of the breakaway props broke too soon. During the emotional family rock-out session, the live drum-playing was offbeat (it appears that Hall and Cox mime their guitar-playing while Valdez actually plays the drums). Finally, after all the script's relationship-building and emotional stress, the conclusion feels sudden and anticlimactic.

Escapism with soul

Teen Dad is a fun date-night experience. The title smartly inverts the overt focus of 90s media on teenaged female sexuality, and the writing, directing, and actors' chemistry make this a highly enjoyable experience. As our American tumult continues, this play is a lighthearted escape while still addressing social issues with a deft touch.

I loved the smart throwaway comments on prison culture from John ("how does anyone heal here?") and the script's mindful quips about lackluster parents, which includes Tom telling his daughter to "lower your expectations, then lower them again." Passage Theatre remains a wild card on my theater list. But if you want lighthearted escapism with a soul, *Teen Dad* has it in spades.

Know before you go: This production contains flashing lights and depictions of police violence.

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WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Teen Dad. By Adrienne Dawes. Directed by C. Ryanne Domingues and Richard Bradford. $22-$48, with $2 Families First Discovery Pass available. Through October 11, 2026, at Mill Hill Playhouse, 205 E Front Street, Trenton. (609) 392-0766 or PassageTheatre.org.