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It takes considerable skill - to say nothing of nerve - to steal a show from the likes of Brad Hauskins, Adam Michael Lewis, and Eddie Staver III. But in the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse's *E mpty Nest*
, actress Ashley Catherine Schmitt arrives halfway through the production, introduces herself to her co-stars, tucks playwright Lawrence Roman's comedy into her leg warmers, and all but dashes off with it. The play itself is too featherweight (albeit agreeably so) for this to be considered grand larceny, but it's certainly grand; Schmitt is like the guest you don't remember inviting who winds up being the life of the party.

Set in Los Angeles circa 1983 - an era that allows for some fabulously cringe-inducing costumes by designer Gregory Hiatt - *Empty Nest* opens with fiftysomething married couple George (Hauskins) and Helene (Vrenda Lee) sending their youngest (Tristan Layne Tapscott's Keith) off to college, having already raised two older sons: Lewis' Michael, a math professor at MIT, and Staver's Elliott, happily married in Houston. Not five minutes after Keith's departure, the relieved (and randy) George and Helene begin making plans for road trips and long-delayed lovemaking, only to have their coitus interrupted, first by the return of Michael, who's left his university position, and then by Elliott, who's left his wife. And then, not long after, there's a knock on the door.

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