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BWW Reviews: Jon Robin Baitz' OTHER DESERT CITIES Blazes with Hidden Fires at MTF

by Don Grigware December 11 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/los-angeles/article/BWW-Reviews-Jon-Robin-Baitz-OTHER-DESERT-CITIES-Blazes-with-Hidden-Fires-at-MTF-20121211#ixzz2GsJyTCjK>



Other Desert Cities/by Jon Robin Baitz/directed by Robert Egan/Mark Taper Forum/through January 6, 2013

At the core of Jon Robin Baitz' engrossing *Other Desert Cities* is the intense love between two siblings, so strong that the sister is willing to destroy the respect and trust of her parents in order to be faithful to her brother's memory. Brooke Wyeth (Robin Weigert) has written a book about how her right wing conservative family dealt with the suicide of her brother Henry, whom we never see. Henry was a drug-addict and anti-war protester accused of subversive activity. Now onstage at the Mark Taper Forum, Robert Egan directs a superlative cast in this deeply penetrating, unpredictable play full of secrets and lies.

Polly and Lyman Wyeth (JoBeth Williams and Robert Foxworth) are a retired Hollywood show business couple - he an actor, she a screenwriter, who live in Palm Springs. Visiting for Christmas 2004 are their two children Trip (Michael Weston), successful in courtroom TV and Brooke, novelist and recovering drug addict. Add to the reunion Polly's sister Silda (Jeannie Berlin), fresh out of rehab; she's a recovering alcoholic and was Polly's writing partner years before. Just a nice big unhappy dysfunctional family at Christmas who come into fierce conflict over Brooke's accusatory expose. Polly, a manipulative control freak has dominated all the lives of her relatives to the extent that no one is willing to take her side. They deal with her, but any abiding love is out of the question. Brooke would rather be back East, Trip in LA with his crowd, Silda anywhere with her head over a bottle, and Lyman exists, shutting out the past. Act I is very funny with the introductions and background of the quirky characters; Act II is a deadly serious gut-wrenching foray inward, leaving much of its audience breathless by play's end. Baitz' uncanny ability to show both sides of the coin with humorous gusto

and stark real emotion rank him as one of our very best writers. Egan as director must deal with the comedy of Act I and help establish a flow. Although the approach may seem a tad sitcomish at first glance, the mood changes and with it his resilient technique.

The ensemble of Other Desert Cities work beautifully together and separately never losing character focus. Williams is a marvel, strong and determined to save face at any cost. Foxworth once again proves his worth as one of our sturdiest stage presences. Weigert has an amazing range of emotion to play and executes quite brilliantly her riddled bewilderment with the half truths presented. Weston as Trip is delightfully droll, sympathetic, the ultimate caring little brother who tries desperately to keep peace in the family. Berlin brings a kind of dazed, yet fearless quality to Silda, who indeed faces honesty better than any one else. A word of praise for Takeshi Kata's set design which puts you smack dab into the typically austere living space of PS affluence.

Not your typical happy Christmastime play! Some do end up getting what they want, but it comes at an exceedingly high price. If you want to be moved to the bottom of your gut, the big payoff in Act II of Other Desert Cities should nail it for you. See it through January 6, 2013!

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