



Double Discourse: “Dream Hou\$e” at the Ent Center

BY: ELLA BARRY AND OLIVIA NORDYKE / ON: FEBRUARY 21, 2024 / IN: ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT, FEATURES

After two movie reviews in our “Double Discourse” format, we decided it was high time for some live theater. If there are other new experiences you’d like to hear our thoughts on, feel free to send us suggestions!

In Theatreworks’ production of “Dream Hou\$e,” sisters Julia (Chelley Canales) and Patricia (Laura Chavez) deal with their mother’s death differently. While Patricia moves back into her mother’s home to be her caretaker in her dying days, Julia lives in denial of her mother’s death and barely calls.

The play focuses on the aftermath of the death while the two sisters enter an HGTV style home renovation show, where they must present themselves to an invisible audience and the show’s realtor star (Katie Medved). Playwright Eliana Pipes’ script touches on themes of generational guilt, culture, financial struggles, familial hardship and gentrification.

Olivia’s Review

4 out of 5 stars

I wasn’t expecting “Dream Hou\$e” to be as beautiful as it was. I had no idea what the play was about going into it. I mostly envisioned a plot similar to “The Money Pit.”

My sole complaint about the show was the first 15 minutes. Live theater thrives on the vibe of the audience, and the crowd wasn’t completely onboard at first. Chavez’s performance seemed stiff to me at the start, and the audience’s response to Medved’s crowd work felt unenthusiastic.

Despite the brief discomfort, my first impression was proven wrong. The plot moves quickly from a funny-yet-sentimental surface to a cerebral experience that probes at deeper feelings. Chavez has my deepest respect for her intensely raw performance during highly emotional scenes.

The show got weird in some places, and I mean that as the highest compliment. Each of the three actors get their own special moments of digging into their characters.

I was particularly impressed by Medved’s ability to switch her initially likable and upbeat persona to an extremely unsettling one. Each of these moments was aided by spectacular artistic direction, using creative lighting techniques to set the mood, and prop choices as wonderful visual aids.

“Dream Hou\$e” is layered, covering a bundle of human experiences in 95 minutes. I found Pipes’ gracefully woven story subtle and powerful, and the plot successfully alludes to the larger problem of gentrification while focusing on one family and their specific history.

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Ella's Review

5 out of 5 stars

My biggest praise for "Dream Hou\$e" is the story itself. Pipes perfectly portrays the pain of losing a parent and the complex ways people cope.

There's an expectation that death brings people together, but I have seen it tear families apart. While plenty of other stories fail to acknowledge this layer of grief, "Dream Hou\$e" captures it well through Julia and Patricia's strained relationship.

As the story progresses, we see Julia and Patricia's sisterhood crumble like the house around them.

The play is set entirely within the beautiful family home. The black box theater combined with the backdrop of a Spanish-style archway and an altar above the fireplace makes the audience feel at home with the characters.

The set and props change as the home is renovated for resale, the progression of the house reflecting the progression of the sisters' relationship. It transforms from a carefully thought out home designed by the sisters' mother, to a home staged by the producers and filled with stereotypical Mexican decor, and later a house emptied for renovation.

As the play moves along the set changes, but the favorite armchair of the sisters' mother stays. Even when all the other furniture has left the set, Julia insists that the armchair stay.

It isn't until the last scene, when the sisters patch up their relationship and the home is remodeled and staged, that the armchair is gone.

"Dream Hou\$e" covers hard-hitting truths of humanity but keeps things funny enough for the audience to both laugh and cry.

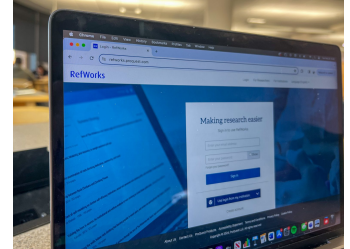
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