

Southbridge



Chicago Dramatists (see Resident companies). By Reginald Edmund. Dir. Russ Tutterow. With Manny Buckley, Wendy Robie, Ashley Honore. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

In 1881, a young biracial man named Christopher Davis was lynched by a mob in Athens, Ohio. He was accused of raping and brutally beating Lucinda Luckey, a widow for whom he had done some work around the house. A band of armed men eventually took Davis from jail, got him to confess to the crime and hanged him from a bridge over the Hocking River.

This disgraceful incident serves as the jumping-off point for playwright Reginald Edmund, who takes a good deal of creative license in his new dramatization of the case. In his version, Christopher (Manny Buckley, whose heart isn't in it) is a visionary who can see into other people's souls. Confined to a jail cell as the angry townspeople gather outside, Christopher recounts for the sheriff (Gene Cordon)—and we see in flashback—how his gift led to a special connection with the lonely Widow Luckey, played by Wendy Robie with an affecting mix of



FORBIDDEN LOVE
Buckley and Robie make a connection.

wistfulness and desperation.

Edmund rearranges the record so that Christopher and the widow have a consensual affair—a development in which we feel the heavy hand of a playwright straining to hit plot points. Despite Russ Tutterow's muffled production, Edmund generates some excitement toward the end, as he uncovers who actually attacked Lucinda. But too much of the script before that is composed of repetitive, wheel-spinning passages in which characters reiterate their motivations and return over and over to the same semi-lyrical lines about trees, dreams and seeing.—*Zac Thompson*

Other Desert Cities



UNJUST DESERTS
Arnold, far right, dredges up the past.



Goodman Theatre (see Resident companies). By Jon Robin Baitz. Dir. Henry Wishcamper. With Deanna Dunagan, Tracy Michelle Arnold, Chelcie Ross, John Hoogenakker, Linda Kimbrough. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

Jon Robin Baitz's 2011 work concerns the secrets and infighting of a wealthy, überprivileged white family. So as contemporary dramatic literature goes—or at least the sort that gets produced on Broadway, named a finalist for the Pulitzer and disseminated to the country's major regional theaters—it's not exactly a unicorn.

Still, if Baitz's drama doesn't break new ground, it's juicy and well constructed. Polly and Lyman Wyeth (Deanna Dunagan and Chelcie Ross) are old-guard California Republicans: he a former screen actor who shifted into politics, she a screenwriter who became the perfect political wife. They're in the mold of the Reagans,

though not stand-ins (Ron and Nancy are frequently mentioned as close friends). The play takes place over Christmas 2004, as depressive, prodigal and liberal daughter Brooke (Tracy Michelle Arnold) arrives for a visit with the manuscript she's just sold: a bombshell memoir about the death of her older brother that casts her parents in an unflattering light.

The recent-period setting, just after the re-election of George W. Bush and as the Iraq War was not yet looking like a quagmire, allows Baitz some too-easy hindsight quips. And all five characters onstage, including Brooke's apolitical TV-producer younger brother (John Hoogenakker) and Polly's dyed-in-the-wool-liberal, recovering-alcoholic sister (Linda Kimbrough), can occasionally sound like authorial hand puppets. Yet both the playwright and director Henry Wishcamper resist facile caricature. Led by Dunagan's flinty, pragmatic Polly and Ross's sonorous Lyman, Wishcamper's top-notch cast sells even Baitz's soapiest twists with aplomb.—*Kris Vire*

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ARED ORCHID THEATRE

Boy Gets Girl



Raven Theatre (see Resident companies). By Rebecca Gilman. Dir. Cody Estle. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 30mins; one intermission.

One of the scariest things about the stalker in Rebecca Gilman's 2000 drama is that he sees himself as the hero in a romantic comedy—the socially awkward schmuck who gets the girl through persistence and the occasional dramatic gesture. Actually, he's much closer to the villain in a Lifetime movie. His psychosis is the play's most dramatic example of a gap between perception and reality. Gilman uses stalking to examine a whole battery of faulty assumptions men make about women and vice versa.

At the center of things is Theresa (Kristin Collins), a smart and capable reporter who becomes the object of a man's dogged and soon frightening

pursuit after a blind date. Gilman provides a strong idea of what experiencing such an ordeal must be like—the fear, the self-doubt, the way it poisons interactions with other men. But unlike Lifetime, the playwright preserves the messy complexity of real life. When, for instance, Theresa is sent to interview a boobs-obsessed, Russ Meyer–like film director (a gloriously lecherous Leonard Kraft), we expect a screed on the objectification of women. Instead, an unlikely friendship develops.

Cody Estle's staging is no great shakes to look at, thanks to Amanda Rozmiarek's too-busy set design involving a splatter-paint floor and multiple playing spaces that remain visible throughout. But the atmosphere is tense and the supporting cast solid, especially Will Casey and Jon Stutzman as Theresa's stalwart colleagues and John Stokvis as the stalker, played with a terrifying mix of guilelessness, mania and menace.—*Zac Thompson*

PHOTOS: LEFT, JEFF PINES; RIGHT, LIZ LAUREN