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Artemisia Theatre present

SWEET TEXAS RECKONING

by Traci Godfrey

directed by Julie Proudfoot

The Den Theatre

June 7 – 30, 2019



Reviewed by Ruth Smerling

BITTERSWEET COMEDY SWEET TEXAS RECKONING RECEIVING MIDWEST PREMIERE WITH ARTEMISIA THEATRE

Why is a redneck always a drunk too? Though redneckery is cultivated through years of breeding, it seems like never happens alone, it must be fueled by hard liquor, preferably homebrew. Yeehaw! Playwright Traci Godfrey's award-winning play, *Sweet Texas Reckoning* enters a God-fearing town in rural Texas where Ellie (Molly Lyons), a drunk redneck, awaits the return of her daughter Kate (Scottie Caldwell), who is now living in New York City. Ellie has alerted Kate's former boyfriend, Alan John or A.J. (John Wehrman) who is so excited he buys himself a new wrinkle-resistant shirt at Walmart. However, they are both dismayed to find that Kate has returned with a guest – Samantha (Anita Kavuu-Ng'ang'a). Ellie is horrified. Samantha is not only African American, she's Kate's pregnant wife. The baby is the result of a generous fluid donation by Kate's brother, Baxter.

Ellie has been cleaning the house all day. It's not a chore though, she has bottles hidden all over. She cleans a little, takes a sip, cleans a little more, takes another sip. By the time A.J. gets there, she's pretty schnockered. When Kate comes in and springs the news on them, A.J. is surprisingly tolerant. Ellie is ready to waive the Confederate flag and drink to it. As the day wears on, Kate is ready to, no longer able to withstand her mother's drunken racism, sexism and threats of damnation. But Samantha begs her to stay. Samantha, filled with hormones and love for the child growing inside her, want to know Ellie and wants Kate to make peace with her.

Ellie is set in her ways, but the thought of not being to hold her grandchild is enough to make her take a long look at herself and the potential quality of her life with and without her daughter in it.

Artemisia Executive Artistic Director Julie Proudfoot worked closely with Traci Godfrey developing *Sweet Texas Reckoning*. Both women are deeply involved with television and at a glance, the show plays a lot like an episode of Brett Butler's '90's sitcom *Grace Under Fire*. Proudfoot directs, giving Godfrey's work its Midwest premiere, nestled high at the Den's Theatre 3A. The play has stolen the hearts and minds of many critics, receiving First Place in the New Works Merit International Playwriting Contest, the Artemisia Fall Festival 2016 and the Playwriting Contest of Pandora Productions in Long Beach, California who produced the play's World Premiere. Popular Chicago actress Molly Lyon snags the role of a lifetime and delivers a stunning performance as Ellie, a devoted mom, steeped in hatred, who must make a 365 degree change to keep up with her ceding family. She is vigorously compelling, tragic and creates an unforgettable character. Scottie Caldwell as the liberated, sophisticated daughter who has put her upbringing behind and Anita Kavuu-Ng'ang'a are a wonderful pair as the mavericks that risk their lives coming home. John Wehrman is aw shucks loveable as the hapless A.J., also bred in racism, but just worldly enough to not take himself seriously.

The tech team deserves an equally big hand. Dialect coaching by Molly Lyons and Corey Bradberry captures the humid pace of true Texas speech and gives Molly and A.J. almost an other-worldly quality. Scenic design by Ann Davis with set built by the Theatre at the Center Scene Shop is a simple home, impeccably kept, designed to be a fortress to keep out demons.

Sweet Texas Reckoning with its bold, yet compassionate direction and brilliant cast, has enough laughs to make the tragedy bearable with a breath of hope for the bad mamma who wants to be good. The show will run through the Pride Month of June at the Den Theatre's cozy, Stage 3A with performances Wednesdays-Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday matinee at 3:00 p.m. The Den is located at 1331 N. Milwaukee Avenue. All seats are \$25. For tickets and further information visit <http://artemisiatheatre.org/plays/>.

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