

“Robbin, from the Hood” at The Road

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Message plays are a pillar of western theater. Our entire theatrical ecosystem is unthinkable without works such as Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* or Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*, to name but a few. It’s part of how theater uses its micro lens to examine the macro issues of the world, something that when done well can be extraordinarily powerful. Sometimes, however, a well-intentioned playwright can shine a spotlight upon a worthy issue but fail to illuminate it effectively, and that, unfortunately, is the case with Marlow Wyatt’s world premiere at the Road Theatre, *Robbin, from the Hood*.

High school student Robbin (iesha m. daniels) lives with her grandfather Percy (William L. Warren), her only remaining family other than her uncle Charles (Joshua R. Lamont), who is currently in prison. Her best friend is the upbeat Juan (Enrike Llamas), and they’re both very excited to have been accepted into a summer job training program for megacorporation Kennedy Global. It’s the first job for both youths, and they were handpicked by Margaret

(Geri-Nikole Love) in spite of her boss Kyle's (Rob Nagle) reservations. Everything seems to be going well until Robbin begins to discover that Kennedy Global is a massively amoral company and so she tries to change things.



Photo credit is Lizzy Kimball.

Daniels is terrific as Robbin, portraying the character's joy, intelligence and reined-in anger with admirable skill. It's a very impressive performance, and I wish the writing had been more fully able to showcase it. Llamas is a comforting and supportive presence as Juan, but he gets to show off his dramatic chops as well in a late-play confrontation. Love is excellent as the clever and forceful Margaret, capturing the role's triumphs and frustrations, but the always superb Nagle gets less to work with in the somewhat underwritten role of Kyle. Warren exudes a casual gravitas as Percy, and Lamont is quite good as the penitent and helpful Charles.

Director Chuma Gault gets strong work from his cast, but his transition to the play's intermission was so abrupt that the audience's confusion was obvious. Nicholas Santiago's projections are very effective, especially a Kennedy Global storage tank looming in the background behind Robbin's home. Wyatt's subject of the prison-industrial complex and how corporations dominate inner-city neighborhoods is very important and interesting. But instead of really focusing on that, her writing too often depends on melodrama, which diffuses the quality of the play. There are moments in which you can see how powerful this play could be,

however, such as an argument between two characters that cuts right to the heart of greed versus humanity. The “Robin Hood” reference in the title is barely connected to the bulk of the show and is mainly just a pun.

There is a lot to enjoy and admire in *Robbin, from the Hood*, but more focus and less melodrama would serve it well.



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Robbin, from the Hood is presented by and at The Road Theatre Company and plays through November 17. Tickets are available at <https://ci.ovationtix.com/35065/production/1205171>.

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