

'Robbin, from the Hood' exposes the evil of racist Big Capital

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From left, Enrike Llamas, iesha m. daniels and William L. Warren. | Lizzy Kimball

NORTH HOLLYWOOD — As its first show of the 2024-25 season, the Road Theatre Company offers up a world premiere, Marlow Wyatt's blazing *Robbin, from the Hood*. It opened on October 11 to a thunderous reception. It runs through Sun., Nov. 17, and should not be missed!

In Wyatt's re-imagination of the classic tale of righteous redistribution, corporate greed is the new villain in the person of The Kennedy Group (corporations are persons, right?—so the Supreme Court tells us). At every turn KG demonstrates how the deceptions inherent in the capitalist game are designed to make rich people richer and the poor and dispossessed ever more desperate. A lost home owing to a purposefully overextended mortgage forms a significant part of the backstory.

The story focuses on Robbin Woods (iesha m. daniels), a Black 17-year-old math genius, known for her scrappy reactivity, who is given the opportunity to enter the seemingly unattainable world of corporate power when she and her Mexican-American buddy Juan (Enrike Llamas) are offered summer internships—she in accounting and he in the mail room. The seduction is intense—spacious offices, a livable paycheck, new outfits, a deeply appreciated complimentary lunchroom buffet, and a corporate driver to take them to and from work, bypassing a long, tiring bus ride all the way across town. “You both deserve to be here. Remember that!” they are advised. The locale is unspecified, but the scenic projections of working-class parts of town and the proliferation of tall palm trees amidst expansive housing tracts strongly suggests a large metropolis very like Los Angeles.

Overnight their lives change as their talents are recognized and rewarded. At home, where Robbin lives with her sickly grandpa Percy (William L. Warren), things begin to perk up. They finally get a new refrigerator



Rob Nagle and Geri-Nikole Love | Lizzy Kimball

even as Percy’s health gradually declines. And the Kennedy Group, which has its fingers in unfathomably extensive projects and investments, has an exciting program to open a number of community centers for education and training, wellness and recreation. Knowing the needs of her own community, this is where Robbin feels she could contribute. She’s been

assigned to entering numbers on spreadsheets, but she is capable of so much more and lets her supervisor, the efficient African-American corporate up-and-comer Margaret Brown (Geri-Nikole Love), know it. She even comes up with a plan that will serve her community well, make the man who hired her, Kyle Mayhew (Rob Nagle, the only white character in the play) look like a hero, *and* make good money for KG.

Mayhew is the highest person at KG that we meet, but he has loftier aspirations and is willing to eat a lot of crow to move up in the system—including sacrificing the community centers he once enthusiastically embraced. He is the stand-in for sleazeball corporate mediocrity, hypocrisy, and compromised morality. Turn the last letter of his name upside-down, and you get “mayhem,” which is ultimately what the Kennedy Group system prescribes for the world, a dog-eat-dog existence for the masses and untold privilege for the owning class. KG is into banking, finance, sports teams, entertainment, AI, solar, marketing, education, you name it—in all 50 states and 150 countries. Not even a calculated exaggeration of what we’re familiar with already, wouldn’t you say?—and bound to get much more pronounced if and when Project 2025 goes into effect.

Robbin comes from a complicated family. She lives with her widowed grandpa Percy because her parents died in their early 20s in a car accident when she was very young. There’s an uncle Charlie (Joshua R. Lamont) who can’t seem to stay out of prison—or, looked at another way, has never been given the opportunities to better himself and inevitably falls into drugs and crime. On a visit, in part to show off her clothes, her new straightened hair and new position, she learns that Charlie makes clothing and textile items as his prison job at 17 cents an hour. She also learns that the correctional facility he’s in is a subsidiary of the Kennedy Group! “We got the same boss,” Charlie observes wryly, teaching her about PIC, the Prison Industrial Complex. It seems like any way you turn, KG has its paws on everything, and all for profitable gain. “They make us pay for being poor.”

Now that she understands just how KG works, and how it co-opts the odd person of color, like herself and Juan, with the right amenities and rewards, she devises a strategy for funding

the community centers that levels the playing field by going around the law. Because, as she's learned, "sometimes you have to do the wrong thing for the right reason."



Joshua R. Lamont and William L. Warren | Lizzy Kimball

An award-winning playwright and actor with a BFA from Howard University College of Fine Arts, Marlow Wyatt has written an excoriating play that lays out the brutal criminality of the system—the real system as it works, not the polite checks-and-balances, equal-opportunity-for-all fairy tales we are taught to believe in. Her “Playwright’s Note” in

the program puts it succinctly. In its entirety, it reads: “*Robbin, from the Hood* was written as a creative protest to American capitalism. Any system that does not benefit the greater good of the majority must be demolished. May the demolition begin with my pen. VOTE.” Is that clear enough?

Directed by Chuma Gault with a deft wit, his cast perform wonders in their roles. Warren portrays a man in the near-to-end stages of life with compassion. As Robbin, Daniels inhabits the anger and impatience of youth institutionally stymied from achieving their best. As Juan, Llamas displays the eagerness to succeed in a world where much that is sordid must be overlooked to thrive. Nagle as Kyle shows an obliviousness to others’ pain in his grasp for greater power at all cost. As Margaret, Love represents the come-up-from-the-ghetto success story who understands what she is complicit in and ultimately defines her own terms with it. And Charlie is in some ways the jailhouse seer, a young man society has turned into a loser but who overcomes his burden.

In his “Director’s Note” Gault speaks of the play as “a tale of resistance and purpose, finding your true calling and standing up for yourself and your community. I hope you enjoy a couple hours in the dark with us, and find inspiration to go out there, find something worth fighting for, and let your voice be heard.”

Scenic design is by Amanda Knehans; lighting by Derrick McDaniel, projections by Nick Santiago; sound design by John Zalewski; costumes by Wendell Carmichael; and properties by Scottie Nevil. The production stage manager is Maurie Gonzalez. *Robbin, from the Hood* is produced by Danna Hyams, Taylor Gilbert and Cherish Monique Duke.

Robbin, from the Hood, with one intermission, runs through Sun., Nov. 17 with performances on Fri. and Sat. at 8 pm and Sun. at 2 pm. Three captioned performances for the deaf and hard of hearing communities will take place on Oct. 25 at 8 pm, Nov. 2 at 8 pm, and Nov. 10 at 2 pm. The Road Theatre is located in The NoHo Senior Arts Colony, 10747 Magnolia Blvd. in North Hollywood 91601. Tickets are available online at the company [website](#) or call (818) 761-8838.

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Eric A. Gordon, *People’s World* Cultural Editor, wrote a biography of radical American composer Marc Blitzstein and co-authored composer Earl Robinson’s autobiography. He has received numerous awards for his *People’s World* writing from the International Labor Communications Association. He has translated all nine books of fiction by Manuel Tiago (pseudonym for Álvaro Cunhal) from Portuguese, available from International Publishers NY.