



# STAGE RAW

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## REVIEWS



Joe Hart, Taylor Gilbert, Rob Nagle, Allison Blaize and Ben Theobald in *Stupid Kid* at the Road Theatre Company.  
(Photo by Brian Cole)



### *Stupid Kid*

Reviewed by Terry Morgan  
*The Road on Magnolia*  
Through Nov. 12

To paraphrase a theater maxim of Edmund Kean's, "Tragedy is easy; comedy is hard." It's an assertion that's proved true time and again. Harder still, perhaps, is successfully combining these two genres into one play, as the disappointing *Big Night* at the Douglas proved a couple of weeks back. Sharr White's new play, *Stupid Kid*, receiving its world premiere at the estimable Road Theatre Company, blends these theatrical modes more effectively. It features some outstanding performances and powerful dramatic moments, but is kept from reaching its maximum potency by a script that needs a tighter rewrite.

Twenty-eight-year-old Chick (Ben Theobald) has just been released, as he puts it, "486 years early" from serving time for a murder. New DNA evidence has freed him, and he's returned to the Colorado home of his parents, Gigi (Taylor Gilbert) and Eddie (Joe Hart), who are surprised and none too happy to see him. There's going to be a retrial, but state representative and ex-cop Unclemike (Rob Nagle) has a proposition that could secure Chick's freedom and garner the family a lot of money, with the proviso that Unclemike gets half of it.

Theobald doesn't quite convince as a man who's spent half his life in prison, but that's partly a flaw in the writing, which calls for Chick to mainly yell and be comically exasperated. Gilbert brings righteous fire to Gigi, but she too is undercut by the script, which has her character spend so much time being unpleasant that her eventual return to rationality seems too little, too late. Hart, however, is superb as the low-key Eddie, exuding a downtrodden dignity and humor.

Michelle Gillette is deadpan hilarious as the deeply stupid neighbor Franny, and Allison Blaize is appropriately intense as the abused Hazel. Nagle steals the show with his ferocious performance as Unclemike — one of the most evil characters I've ever seen on stage. It's said that villains are more enjoyable to play than heroes, and Nagle is having a ball here, as he commands the proscenium with funny and frightening brilliance.

Director Cameron Watson's gets some terrific work from his ensemble, and he incorporates a set change later in the show with clever panache. Designer Jeff McLaughlin's interior fits the family's mood perfectly — all grays and sad variations on beige. There are a lot of good things in White's writing — in particular, one scene in Act 2 is powerfully painful in its dramatic impact. But his insistence that the poor characters speak like idiots a lot of the time — talking about seeing the "libarian" at the "libary" or constantly saying "irregardless" — seems heavy-handed, especially because they magically get smarter and more sensitive in Act 2. The play has problems with tone shifts, and the coda is regrettably feeble.

*Stupid Kid* is worth seeing for the strength of its performances, but this play requires more focus than it currently has.