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## STUPID KID

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WOW!

Folks are dumb where Chick Ford comes from, which is why you may be excused for assuming at first that Sharr White's Stupid Kid has nothing but poor white trash jokes in store for audiences at The Road On Magnolia. But think again. Chick and his kinfolk are about to reveal far more about the Eastern Colorado Fords than initially meets the eye.



Pain-pill-addicted patriarch Eddie (Joe Hart) can perhaps be excused for not recognizing the 28-year-old (Ben Theobald) who shows up on his doorstep dressed in an oversized zippered sweatshirt, Capri pants barely halfway down his thighs, and shoes that look more like house slippers than anything a man his age would wear.

The last time Eddie saw his son, Chick was after all a mere fourteen, and since he wasn't supposed to be coming till tomorrow, the young man could well be "some detainee friend of his posin' as Chick, wantin' to get us to lower our guard down so's you could take our shit."

Not that there's any "shit" worth taking in the rundown Ford abode, just a "junk-assed chair, TV tray, two crappy antlers stuck on a board," shit like that, which tells you something about the Fords' economic situation and their rung on the social ladder.



Gigi Ford (Taylor Gilbert) seems even less inclined to welcome her son back from what we surmise must have been fourteen years in the slammer. Not only does she insist that Chick not engage in "nothin' illegal" under her roof, he's going to be sleeping on the "couch," his room having been rented out to Gigi's state senator brother Unclemike (Rob Nagle), homeless since his wife Georgette's went and "turned herself into a fella'."



Not that Unclemike's hurting for female companionship, having eagerly accepted the "budget-constrained" sheriff's department's offer to serve as "Volunteer Probation Officer" to 20something Hazel (Allison Blaize), on proba for drugs but still serving time as Unclemike's virtual sex slave in Chick's old room.

Playwright White takes his deliberate time in parsing out the reason for the Stupid Kid's years behind bars and his unexpected release some four-hundred-eighty-six years ahead of schedule.

He's equally deliberate in ever so slowly peeling away each character's layers of onion skins to reveal what's hidden beneath, from the surprising to the shocking to the downright horrifying.

There's also considerable humanity to be discovered in Stupid Kid, just one reason why, directed by Cameron Watson at his most masterful, it ends up one of the year's most emotionally powerful dramatic achievements.



The always stunning Gilbert gives her finest performance to date, casting aside all vanity as a woman ravaged by a devastating town scandal and resolute in her decision not to let her maternal heart be shattered ever again.



Theobald's dynamic star-on-the-rise turn reveals oceans of depth and pain below Chick's adorably dumb surface, Hart's salt-of-the-earth Eddie is yet another bit of brilliance from the Broadway/L.A. treasure, Blaize positively blazes when Hazel's inner fierceness at long last gets let out, and Michelle Gillette is a daffy delight as nosy neighbor Franny Hawker.

Last but definitely not least, a sensational Nagle is both fearless and formidable as a good ol' boy hulk with whom you do not under any circumstance wish to tangle.

Scenic designer Jeff McLaughlin and properties designer Michael O'Hara join forces to give us a Ford home no one in their right mind would even want to visit, let alone live in, and just wait till McLaughlin does what he does best in an Act Two turnabout.



Add to that Jared A. Sayeg's

subtly expert lighting, Kate Bergh's terrifically trailer-trashy costumes, and Christopher Moscatiello's pulse-pounding sound design and you've got yet another Road Theatre Company production design winner, with additional kudos to dialect coach Tracy Winters and to fight choreographer Bjørn Johnson for a knock-down drag-out that may leave you too gasping for breath.

Stupid Kid's World Premiere is produced by Madeline Fair and Kevin Shipp. Tally McCormack, Ryan McRee, and Melelani Satsuma are assistant directors. Maurie Gonzalez is stage manager and Satsuma is assistant stage manager.

Not only has Sharr White written one of the year's best plays in Stupid Kid, it proves one of the most satisfying as well. I haven't applauded so hard (so hard it hurt) in a good long while.

The Road Theatre, NoHo Senior Arts Colony, 10747 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood.  
Through November 5. Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 2:00. Reservations: 818  
761-8838  
[www.RoadTheatre.org](http://www.RoadTheatre.org)

–Steven Stanley  
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Photos: Ben Cole