

## REVIEW – Sister Cities – Dragon Productions Theatre

When I read the script of *Sister Cities* several months ago, I was moved to tears. For your own frame of reference, this is not a common response for me. The number of times I've cried at the theatre can be counted on one hand and I can't actually recall any play I've ever read whose mere text has move me thusly. So, right there you have a significant challenge on your hands. The question you have to ask is, having already heard it in your head a certain way, visualized it, spoiled the "surprises" and shed your tears, are you really going to be able to enjoy watching it as an audience member. I'm happy to report, the answer is yes. A thousand times yes. And, one more for good measure. Yes.

From a purely practical standpoint it is no easy task to find four actresses who can so easily pass for sisters from the same mother. Harder still to find four GOOD actresses who share enough similarity to pass. On the Dragon stage it is impossible to deny that through whatever combination of hair dye, acting, directing, costuming and witty dialogue, this cast does a stellar job of convincing me I need no DNA test. Beyond the superficial, there's a tremendous amount of depth and truth layered in the writing of *Sister Cities* and that depth and truth is mirrored in the performances of this play. Really, in all aspects of this production I felt the delicate (and in some case not-so-delicate) unwrapping of these layers was authentic, respectful and ultimately integral to the play's success. Amidst a plot heavy with painful, personal secrets and impossible predicaments these incredible actresses compassionately convey a well-balanced, well-paced, therapeutic exploration of life, death, compassion, and difficult choices.

The intimate theatre (you can hear the sniffles and sighs of the audience along with yours) is like an extension of the mother character in this play. You feel her presence. You feel her spirit in the room. You feel that the sisters feel it as soon as they enter. It's an infuriating, sorrowful, alienating, overbearing, morbid, distant, essential, confusing, maternal and ultimately familiar and comforting presence, that helps audience and actors alike through to the inevitable end. This room is steeped in memories we have no possible way of remembering and yet somehow like a lingering perfume, you can almost piece together the life there and the effect it has had on these sisters.

Indeed, the cast, crew, script, design team, and theatre itself are well matched here. The direction is certainly metaphorical. The sisters distancing themselves and their secrets translates to staging with gaps the width of the room. The one being ganged up

on ends up in the corner. Literally. And the free-spirited sister is in as little clothing as you can get away without being too distracting. This seems a bit too literal in places, but these types of choices work VERY well in the majority of the play, emphasizing the internal struggles that eventually become external.

This play is about so many things. One of my favorites is of course the theme of sisters. I'm the 3rd of four kids and the 2nd of three sisters so I have my share of "inside" jokes on the matter of sisters. No matter how polar opposite you may be, no matter how fundamentally different you live your lives, somehow biology sneaks up on you. There are true unconditional threads (mostly apparent in the similar humor) that connect these women in spite of their drastically different life experiences.

When you get down to it, sisters are pretty special things and this play honors that sacred relationship beautifully. You can whisper your fears in the dark to your sisters. You can tell them your dreams and they seem closer to reality for having just shared them. And, though a sister's judgement can cut you deeper than a knife, with a simple glance she has the power to absolve you of any doubts or guilt you may have ever had. That bond is apparent in these performances and the transformation of these women (in under two hours) is really nothing short of remarkable.

Essentially, it comes down to this. I knew what was coming. I'd braced and prepared myself for it. I was well aware of a certain item on stage being just a stage prop and yet; an audible gasp, unexpected flinch and the release of fresh tears. Damn. Got me. But also. Thanks. I think I needed that. I think we all need that every once in a while.

Be warned, this play may inspire you to call your entire family (up your calling plan minutes before you attend) and it may encourage a tear or two from you as well (bring a tissue just in case, you won't be the only one to cry if you do, I promise) but, it will certainly inspire you to applaud afterwards. And, so it is an easy 4 1/2 out of 5 jewels in the tiara for a nearly flawless interpretation of this heartbreaking and hilarious play. *Sister Cities* plays through October 23rd at the [Dragon Productions Theatre in Palo Alto](#) and should really not be missed.