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Andy Garcia Headlines Reimagined Key Largo at the Geffen

Steve Gottfried · Wednesday, November 20th, 2019

It doesn't take a *very stable genius* (to borrow a Trumpian phrase) to connect the dots between the current production of *Key Largo* at the Geffen and the brazen corruption at the heart of the current administration. Adapted by Andy Garcia and Jeffrey Hatcher, this *Key Largo* is a compelling parable for our current political reality. While the story is inspired by the 1948 movie (as well as the 1939 play upon which it's based), this reworking by Garcia and Hatcher stands apart as something of a hybrid with none-too-subtle jabs at Trump and his cronies. Watching the play unfold against the backdrop of the impeachment hearings feels particularly resonant. But coming on the heels of Trump's recent announcement of filing for residency in Florida seems downright prescient.

Headlined by a stellar cast of recognizable names and faces, this staging has a solid pedigree that serves it well and includes original music composed by Arturo Sandoval. For those unfamiliar with either the original movie or the play on which it's based, *Key Largo 2019* is a morality play, pitting the forces of decency against the forces of corruption. Army commander Frank McCloud (played by Danny Pino) is the straight arrow who comes to pay his respects to the father and widow of a fallen soldier under his command. They're taking refuge in a Florida hotel bracing for the arrival of a hurricane. While doing so, McCloud bears witness to the collateral damage of a drug deal gone wrong orchestrated by resident gangster, Johnny Rocco (played by Andy Garcia). The evocative hotel set, designed by John Lee Beatty, is a character unto itself, serving as the metaphorical reservoir for these junkyard dogs. The hurricane ramps up along with the tension as the authorities get wind of a dead body which necessitates an investigation and threatens to expose those involved. As the noose tightens, Rocco redoubles his efforts to control the situation the only way he knows how. With lies, deflection, intimidation and bribery. Sound familiar?



Money flies in the final standoff between Johnny Rocco and Frank McCloud.

Garcia (as Rocco) makes his entrance in a silk red lounging robe like a mash-up of Bugsy Siegel and Hugh Hefner. But for all intents and purposes, Rocco is a stand-in for Trump. Garcia has described the character as a malignant narcissist, a term many have used to describe Trump. Rocco is a loud-mouthed, blowhard braggart, with dialogue that seems tailor-made to invoke the macho posturing and warped mobster lawlessness of our current commander-in-chief. The only thing that's missing is the over-long red tie. McCloud, by contrast, is the designated moral center of this piece. For lack of a better analogy, McCloud is James Comey to Rocco's Trump. Rocco despises everything McCloud represents because it's a reminder of his own shortcomings. Danny Pino strikes the right balance, letting Rocco rant and rail while he remains solid and steady. Tony Plana

gives a powerful performance as Mr. Alcala, the blind father of the fallen soldier who fearlessly stands up to Rocco.

Joely Fisher is a standout as Gaye Dawn, Rocco's long-suffering boozier moll. From her wobbly first entrance to her soul-crushing implosion, Fisher humanizes the character into a flesh and blood tragicomic heroine with a steady stream of zingers which offset the melodrama. She takes Rocco's abuse, bristles at his cruelty, and comes back for more. At one point, Rocco coerces her into performing a song by dangling another drink as a reward. But after she complies, eking out a heartrending "Moaning Low," he reneges, deriving perverse pleasure from her pain.

Armed with cash and a thuggish crew, Rocco finds a way to subvert justice and tries to coerce McCloud to aid his getaway. But McCloud stands his ground and calls his bluff, giving Rocco a literal run for his money. To paraphrase the Bard, the purpose of theater is to hold a mirror up to reality and reflect it back in a way that's enlightening and cathartic. The parallels in this reimagined *Key Largo* are self-evident to anyone who's followed the news or the tweets. Whether you find this production hits too close to home or whether you find it cathartic, the cast acquits itself admirably with conviction.

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