

# BWW Review: BECKY'S NEW CAR Kills at Mildred's Umbrella

by Katricia Lang Feb. 6, 2016



**Celeste Roberts** and **Ryan Kelly** as Becky and Joe Foster

Photo by: Gentle Bear Photography

**"Humor is truth," says playwright **Steven Dietz** in an interview on his extramarital romantic comedy BECKY'S NEW CAR. Dietz's is a noble but seldom reached goal. And yet, BECKY'S**

**NEW CAR at Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company is what truth in comedy looks like.**

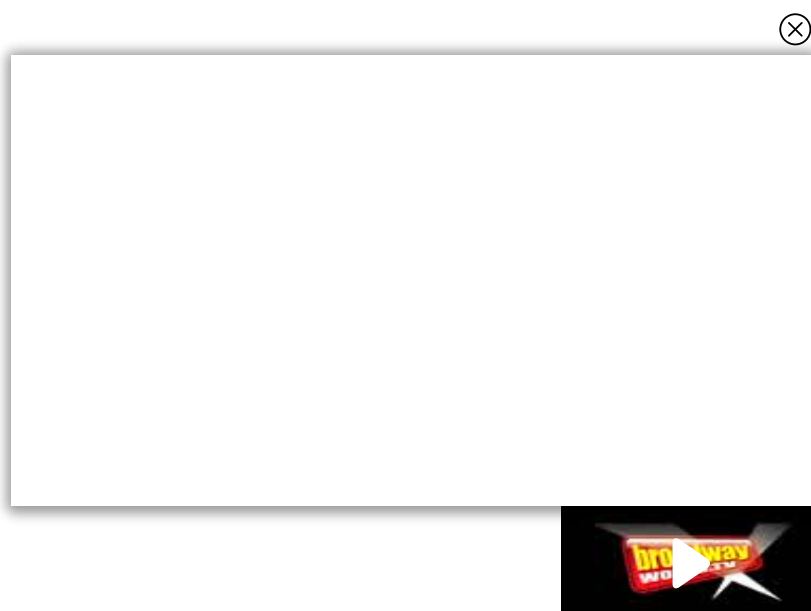
Rebecca "Becky" Foster (**Celeste Roberts**) is listless. At 45+, the middle-class, middle-aged mother and wife resignedly trudges through life.

She is on autopilot in her comfortable 30-year marriage with her supportive and caring husband, Joe (**Ryan Kelly**). She is an office manager-read: middle manager-at a car dealership. And each day, in her smaller-than-a-cubicle sized desk, she listens to her co-worker, a grief-stricken car salesman named Steve (Rod Todd), deliver timeworn monologues about his deceased wife.

Basically, she has white people problems<sup>[1][2]</sup>. She is a valuable employee, a trusted confidante to a colleague, and her husband tolerates, with unending patience and fealty, her late nights at work and his son's trite musings on the existential.

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The kicker, besides Dietz's writing, is that Becky is still as likeable as **Tom Hanks** in SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE. Even as she tries not-nearly-hard-enough to avoid cheating on her husband with the trusting **Walter Flood (Steve Bullitt)**, a witless millionaire smitten with her, she is endearing.

Roberts makes Becky so gosh darn congenial. The performers' forays into the audience are poised to avoid upsetting the most reluctant or anxiety-ridden of audience members. In breaking this

Becky (Roberts) listens as Steve (Rod Todd) recounts his wife's untimely death.

Photo by: Gentle Bear Photography

fourth wall on several occasions to pull audience members onstage and direct address the crowd, Roberts does not hide behind the mask of her comedic character or the play's metatheatrics. She tells the tall tale that is the play without a hint of dishonesty. What's more, the actress achieves spontaneity and (seeming?) improvisation with a role she has so solidly crafted.

Another reason for the character's continued appeal-her problems are important, inconsequential as they may seem. The Foster family members live in a post-recession America. Becky's son, Chris, lives in the basement attached

from this grim economic reality and adds so

A solid supporting cast bolsters the play. **Ryan Kelly** is fun to watch as the wry, salt of the earth roofer and husband. Justin White is as annoying as his Roberts is amiable in the role of Chris, Becky

and Joe's sweatpants wearing son. **Steve Bullitt** gives Walter the right amount of sweetness and innocence. and Sara Jo Dunstan and **Elizabeth Marshall** Black amuse as Kensington "Kenni" Flood and Ginger, Walter's perky daughter and feisty neighbor Ginger, respectively.



The clarity of the production depends on Light Design by Greg Starbird and Sound Design by John Peeples. Even though a chair functions as a car, there's no disorientation or misunderstanding. The lighting is subtle but complex. Starbird turns a chair into a car by using the lights to frame Roberts. Then, amazingly, he softens not an image but a live woman. Roberts is miming a steering wheel but

Houston



Photo by: Gentle Bear Photography

decidedly unreal. The costuming provides a nice counterbalance.

Director **Ron Jones** makes corralling all these elements to tell Becky's story look easy. A directorial highpoint is the atmosphere of trust he cultivates between audience and actor with the placement of Becky's living room front and center, inches away from the audience (probably in feeling more than space). Credit is also owed to Studio 101, which is a small but sized perfectly to make Becky's living room



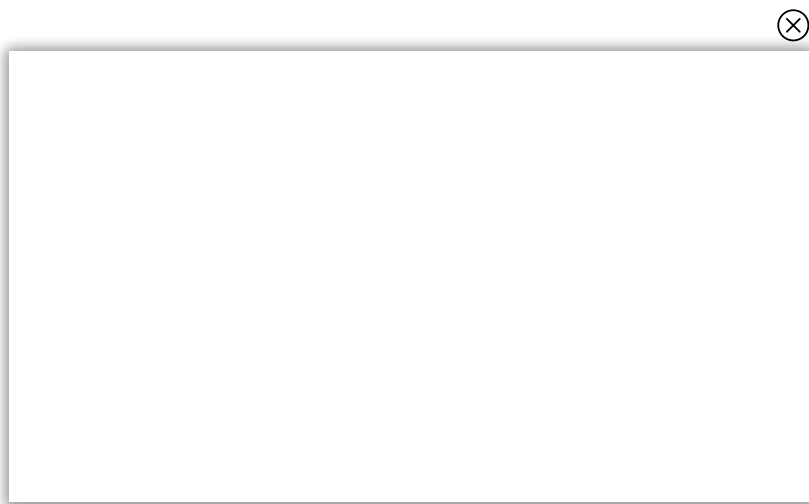


Together Jones and Artistic Director Jennifer Decker handpicked BECKY'S NEW CAR for Mildred's Umbrella. Like THE DROWNING GIRLS, the 2015 BroadwayWorld Houston Awards Winner for Best Play, it is a wonderful choice. Dietz's writing is snappy in both pace and wit. The story snatches the audience up by the collar and doesn't let go until the end of the final scene. On top of this, it is one of the very few stories in performing arts and entertainment that is centered on the sexy romantic entanglements of woman on, as Steve says, "the fifty side of forty."

**BECKY'S NEW CAR runs through Saturday February 6, which means that the final performance is TONIGHT at 8 pm. \$15 - \$20. Studio 101, 1824 Spring Street. 832-463-0409.**  
**[mildredsumbrella.com](http://mildredsumbrella.com).**

Photos courtesy of Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company

[1] "We have white people problems in America. ... That's where your life is amazing, so you just make shit up to be upset about." says **Louis CK** in his 2010 comedy special HILARIOUS.



[2] Before you start emailing, I will concede-yes, in America, white people problems is slowly but surely becoming first world problems. One fine morning we'll all be able to say that white people

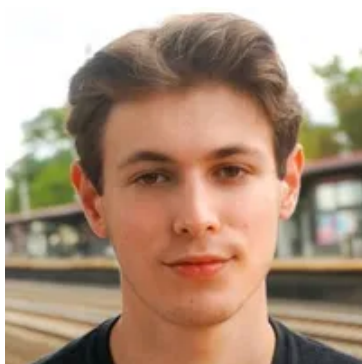
problems no longer exist. *That* is the true realization of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream. Well, *That* and **democratic socialism**. As for the present day, however, my white friend-CK in HILARIOUS again: " ... Who could even argue [that being white isn't clearly better]? If it was an option I would re-up every year."

## Featured on Stage Door

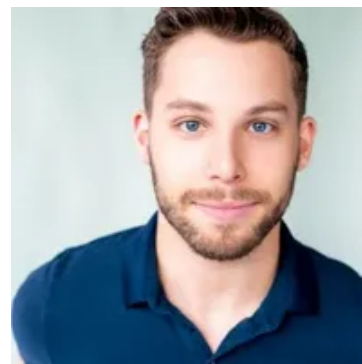
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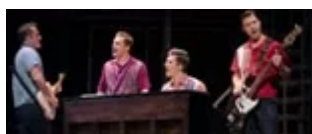
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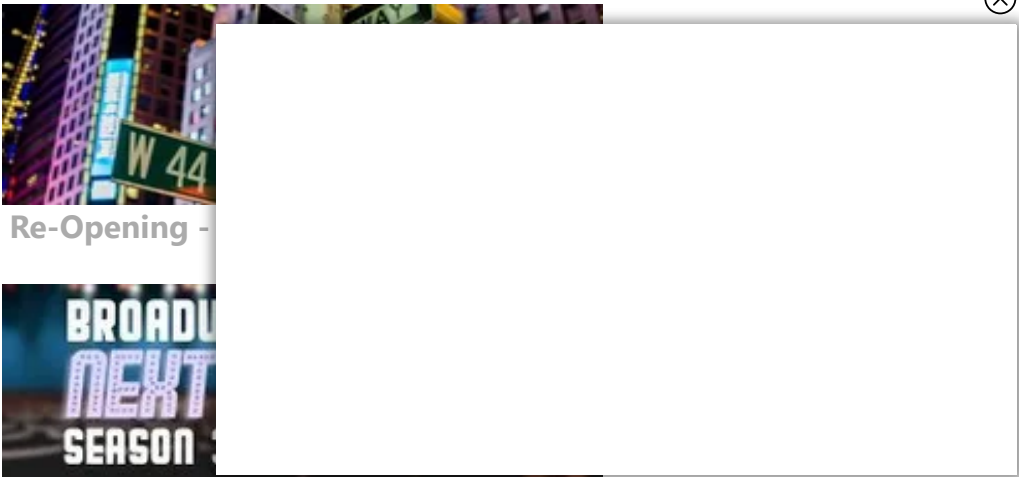
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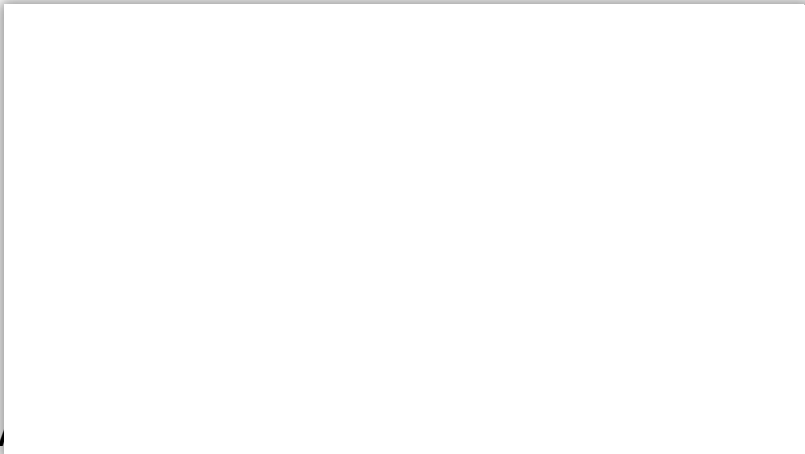
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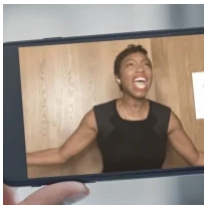
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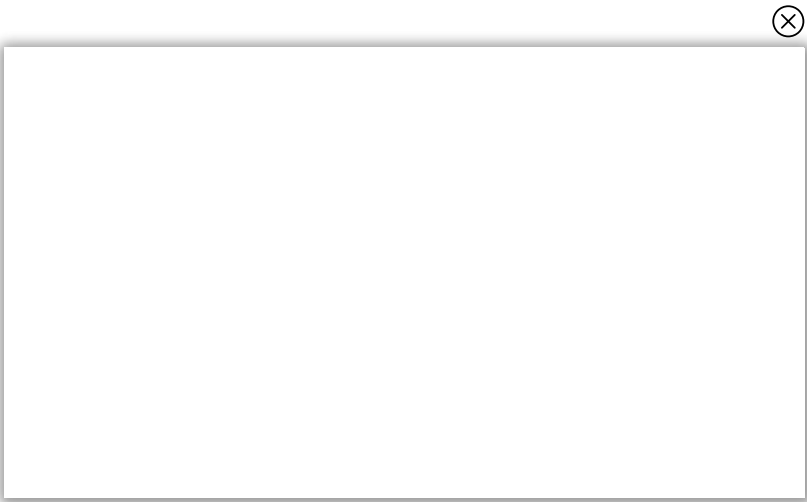
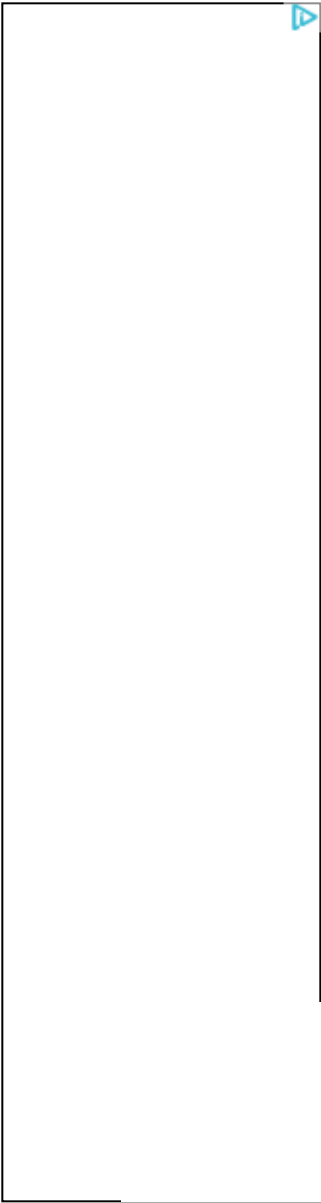
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