

Redwood Curtain's 'Marjorie Prime' is remarkable, must-see theater

PHOTO BY EVAN WISH PHOTOGRAPHY
Christina Jioras, Joan Schirle and Gary Sommers are pictured in Redwood Curtain's "Marjorie Prime."



BY BETI WEBB TRAUTH
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Let me honestly state that "Marjorie Prime" is unquestionably one of the finest and most memorable shows that Redwood Curtain has ever produced — an apt description of a play that uniquely explores how every human being's memories of the lives they've lived are eventually, selectively chosen.

This happens when our minds (as we age further away in time from the specific details of our past realities) can choose to remember the best and brightest moments and hide the most painful, dark ones. Not exactly pretending that they didn't happen, but subconsciously refusing to accept that they did.

So, when an 85-year-old woman named Marjorie's life is disappearing, little by little, into the relentlessly blurring clouds of Alzheimer's forgetfulness, her fact and

fiction have obviously become pieces of a scattered jigsaw puzzle that can never be joined together again. Even with the input of an artificial-intelligence "primary companion" named Walter scientifically programmed to do so.

He's been created as her "Prime" in the form of her late husband, Walter — not at the age when he died, but in his handsome late 20s during the time that Marjorie has "chosen" to remember him. And, he constantly asks her questions about herself and personal incidents, forcing her to remember who she was and what she did. Whether she wants to or not.

Joan Schirle is brilliantly heartbreaking as the fiercely fragile Marjorie — a tour-de-force performance underscored with subtle, wry humor, and William English III artistically comes into his own as the faux-human, computer-being Walter. The unique pair set the mesmerizing tone for the events that unfold (unbroken by an

intermission) over the unsettling, fascinating 90 minutes that follow.

They are joined with equally compelling performances by the other two members of this peerless cast. Christina Jioras impresses as Marjorie's edgy, resentful daughter, Tess, who obviously has some deep-seeded anger issues with her mother that no amount of "Prime" help seems likely to resolve.

And Gary Sommers is endearingly understated and superb as her husband, Jon, a man caught in the middle of everyone's else's emotional crossfire. He has never been so believably vulnerable or better as he fully inhabits the role.

During the course of events, family secrets are uncovered concerning a son's untimely death, black poodles, Tess's strained relationship with her own daughter that mirrors hers with Marjorie and many more underlying problems stemming from forgotten and flawed memories of lost

loves and lacks of communication. (Tess' greatest fear is that she's becoming another version of Marjorie. Is she?)

Playwright Jordan Harrison allows his characters to slowly unpeel intriguing layers of themselves as the show progresses, all the while exploring the question of whether someone like Marjorie has the right to choose the memories she wants to keep alive — even if her "living" exists only in a Prime computer's memory instead.

This thought-provoking material has director Kaitlyn Samuel's insightful touch apparent throughout, and she has been blessed with an extraordinary ensemble of actors who fulfill her vision. The show's technical aspects are also flawless.

The scenic design by Laura Rhinehart is abstract and fluid — made visually stunning and enhanced by Ray Gutierrez's lighting and Kai Lassen's sound designs (run by Carey Sandgren), and each character-defining costume was designed by Bethany Lamoureux. The stage manager/running crew is Morgan McBroom.

Is there a "Prime" in everyone's future? The show's poignant conclusion is both foreshadowed and unexpected, bitter-sweet and haunting. You'll remember and ponder it, long after the final curtain.

Redwood Curtain's must-see production of "Marjorie Prime" continues its run on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. through Sept. 29. There are also Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Sept. 16 and 23.

Tickets on Cheap Date Night Thursdays Sept. 13, 20 and 27 are two for \$20. All other performance tickets are \$17. They can be purchased and reserved securely online at www.redwoodcurtain.com, or reserve them by emailing boxoffice@redwoodcurtain.com or calling 707-443-7688.

Seating is limited to 80, so advance reservations are highly recommended, and there is absolutely no late seating after curtain.

The venue is located at 220 First St. between C and D streets in Eureka, with the main entrance at the rear of the building through Snug Alley.