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Two-Bit Taj Mahal



Drama by Paul D'Andrea

Two-Bit Taj Mahal

“A ripping yarn, based on an unsolved FBI case, that shimmers with the enigmatic grandeur of a fairy tale ... jaw-dropping twists ... compelling dialogue.” —*The Washington Post*

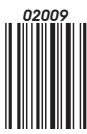
Drama. By Paul D'Andrea. *Cast: 3m., 2w., extras can be used for crowd scenes.* In New Liberty, Missouri, a contemporary American Midwestern farming town—total population a little less than five hundred—the townspeople have been having a series of agitated meetings on what to do about Clay Bayliss, the region’s dangerous loner-bully. The charges are that Clay’s been stealing livestock, burning barns, picking fights, making menacing phone calls, molesting women, and, recently, has taken at least one full-on shot at a citizen, all the while repeatedly and skillfully evading the law. There are crimes, but never any witnesses. As the townspeople inexorably move toward a decision, Sally Faye Redmond, a charismatic young drifter, shows up from nowhere and captures Clay in an intense love affair. Unwilling to be just another woman in his life, Sally demands Clay give her a gift no man has ever given any woman before. Just as Clay transforms under her influence and is about to give Sally a truly magnificent gift—a northwest Missouri Taj Mahal—the townspeople, under extreme duress, make their decision. This is a story of lives that are fierce, urgent, sexy, turbulent, and yet touched by humor and grace. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Code: Tj1.*

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TWO-BIT TAJ MAHAL

By
PAUL D'ANDREA



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For Gisela

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Two-Bit Taj Mahal was produced by Theater of the First Amendment, Fairfax, Virginia, June 2008, Rick Davis, artistic director, Kevin Murray, managing director, Kristin Johnsen-Neshati, artistic associate, with the following:

CAST

Clay Bayliss Whalen J. Laurence
Francine Woodard Maura McGinn
Orus Woodard Michael Willis
Hayden Emory Bob Rogerson
Sally Faye Redmond Meredith Autry

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director Heather McDonald
Scenic Designer James Kronzer
Lighting Designer Martha Mountain
Properties Michelle Elwyn
Technical Director Ethan Osborne
Stage Manager David Elias
Production Manager Karalee Dawn
Costume Designer Howard Vincent Kurtz
Sound Designer Kevin Dunayer
Stage Combat and Movement Director Ken Elston
Dramaturg Kristin Johnsen-Neshati
Assistant Stage Manager Ashley Duncan
Assistant to the Director Patrick Magill
Publicist Jim Maiwurm
Marketing . Patrick 'Shawn Carberry, Paul Philip D'Andrea

TWO-BIT TAJ MAHAL

CHARACTERS:*

CLAY BAYLISS 30s, maybe older

SALLY FAYE REDMOND about 24, very female

FRANCINE GATES WOODARD. . . . 50s, but could be in
early 60s

ORUS WOODARD. 50s plus, but older than Francine

HAYDEN EMORY a year or so older than Francine

** See end of play for expanded character descriptions.*

SET: Stage right, a sewing table and a lamp suggest a farmhouse interior. DR is a hobby area with Orus' collectibles. Clay's yard, with a rusting harrow, is DL. Wheat fields and big sky upstage. Center stage is variously a meeting hall, a tavern and a street in town. Hayden has a home space UL, where he reads the law and waits.

TIME AND PLACE: The recent past, in Missouri.

NOTES:

- "Missouri" is pronounced "Missourah."
- Producers may create their own distinctive musical motifs for Sally and Clay.

EXPANDED CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

CLAY BAYLISS - A rogue farmer with a self-destructive terrorist energy. A strong, menacing presence. His character is volatile. Left on his own, he's a bully and a potential killer, but heated to a certain temperature, he sublimates over into a new state.

SALLY FAYE REDMOND - Her beauty, guts and delicacy constitute strength. She has a personal alchemy that turns them into it. Her voice melts your kneecaps. She loves danger and adventure. Humorous, self-confident, too self-confident. Her muscles are capable of propelling tigers.

FRANCINE GATES WOODARD - She still has her strong physical attractiveness. She is susceptible to ignition and capable of taking a pretty desperate chance, if she had to. In a town with its full complement of warp, she is a leading danger.

ORUS WOODARD - Whenever he becomes conscious, the consciousness coming up through his constant farm labor, he is in quest of something wonderful, perhaps comradeship. He has a strong imagination that has never been used, its energy sludged into a feeble romanticism that finds expression in collecting antiques. When his imagination is finally charged, he is frightened at what it shows him. Grain, machinery and other inanimate things are best for him. Proud of his thrift and decency; unaware of his capacity for crime.

HAYDEN EMORY - A farmer, whose whole life is centered on getting land, machinery and return on investment, an impulse so strong it overwhelms his native cowardice. Very good at what he does. Willing to take a deep breath and a big risk when he sees the time is finally right.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

It's late March in the town of New Liberty, Missouri—population four hundred and sixty. But there's nothing backward about the town. Just about everyone in it travels, watches television, including the national nightly news, and discusses the issues of the day.

THUNDER and LIGHTNING. LIGHTS UP on FRANCINE GATES WOODARD sewing at her electric portable sewing machine, set up on a table, next to a floor lamp. A LIGHTNING bolt takes out her electricity. Her sewing lamp goes OFF. FRANCINE checks the lamp and exits.

Rain, thunder and LIGHTNING. NOISE of a hog in distress. We're in farmland. This particular piece runs between the property of CLAY BAYLISS and that of his wealthy neighbor, HAYDEN EMORY.

CLAY enters, illuminated by flashes of LIGHTNING. CLAY's pulling a powerfully built prize hog by a heavy rope, toward a large bowl. The animal struggles to get free. CLAY wrestles and straddles the hog. The hog continues to squeal, and its violent exertions nearly toss CLAY off. The squeals are extreme. CLAY pulls a hunt-

ing knife from a sheath on the back of his belt and cuts the animal's throat. The slash stops the squealing. It is now eerily silent. The dying animal gives a buck or two but CLAY is not thrown. CLAY gives a defiant hump or two back. CLAY hefts the front part of the carcass and holds the throat over the bowl. MUSIC, CLAY's motif. CLAY wipes his knife on a rag from his pocket and sheathes the weapon. CLAY picks up the bowl and moves downstage. A SPECIAL LIGHT comes up to reveal the bowl. It is about a foot across, finished in a bright crimson glaze, and it's full of blood. CLAY inspects the blood and dips his hand into the bowl. His hand comes out dripping, and he wipes it with the rag. CLAY tosses the bloody rag down at the base of the bowl and exits, dragging the hog.

LIGHTS crossfade to FRANCINE getting a town meeting started at the American Legion Hall in New Liberty. Her husband, ORUS, gives her a reassuring touch as she fidgets, getting ready to lead the meeting. She holds on to her clipboard tightly.

FRANCINE (*to the TOWNSPEOPLE*). The will of the people is the law of the land. That's what the Founding Fathers said.

(HAYDEN EMORY enters.)

HAYDEN. That's *not* what they said. Sorry I'm late, Francine. But I read the law, and the Founders—leastways the Founders who lived in Missouri—said, and I quote, the payback is—

FRANCINE (*interrupting him*). You are out of order! That's what you're out of, Hayden Emory! I have the floor. Now. (*Looks out at the town-meeting audience.*) Graham, good to see you. Amanda. Harriet. Good to see you all. (*Clears her throat.*) Clay Bayliss is a terrorist. Since he came here, ten years ago, he has become without any question, the greatest menace our community has ever faced. (*ORUS points to some late arrivals in the audience.*) Could you make some room there for Purdy Burdette and Rudy? Sibyl, could you scoot over?

HAYDEN. I heard that Hoagie down in Shanley found a goat carcass stuffed with dollar bills.

FRANCINE. Never mind the dollar bills. You do not have the floor.

HAYDEN. Well. You say floor. I say a bloody carcass stuffed full with antique dollar bills and excrement. Hoagie said.

FRANCINE. Hayden, would you sit down?

HAYDEN. No, I will not.

FRANCINE. I am the chair.

ORUS. It was bullion.

HAYDEN. Not dollar bills?

ORUS. Gold bullion. Clay gets it in Maryville at the Certified Mint they got there. He steals property—our property—sells it at the Certified and turns it into gold.

HAYDEN. Gold is easy to hide and it does not rust.

ORUS. Doesn't take up any room.

FRANCINE. Oral sodomy—

HAYDEN. Oral *what*?

FRANCINE. Among many crimes against women—he takes them into his tar paper shack—

ORUS. —it's got plastic on the windows—

FRANCINE. —and *uses* them carnally and commits with them and then throws them out—ravaged!

HAYDEN. Well, how about Bendler!

FRANCINE. Well, yes, Bendler! Never mind the goat carcass! Clay Bayliss *shot* Neil Bendler!

HAYDEN. Gut shot him.

ORUS. Didn't die, though.

FRANCINE. I thought gut shot people always die.

ORUS. They do. "Gut shot" is a rumor. Bendler was hit by pellets from a shotgun and not head on, either.

HAYDEN. I heard he was gut shot.

ORUS. You're gut shot, you die. Let's get the facts straight. Clay's done plenty of real bad things without we invent them.

HAYDEN. I heard he grinds bones on his grinding wheel.

ORUS. Well, what's grinding bones? There's no law about grinding bones!

FRANCINE. He rips women from their cars and uses his wiles—

ORUS. Francine, Francine, Francine. Word is, he's a *rapist*. Rape isn't wiles. Rape is violent and cannot be tolerated.

FRANCINE. Corey Hopkins says Clay's a houseburner. Sarissa says so, too.

ORUS. I've heard that.

HAYDEN. Well, we got to pull the son of a bitch—

FRANCINE. We won't have profanity here. Not while I am the chairperson.

HAYDEN. —pull the SOB, then, out of his truck and—

ORUS. And what?

HAYDEN. Teach him a lesson.

ORUS. What kind of lesson?

HAYDEN. I read the law.

ORUS. You're no lawyer, Hayden.

HAYDEN. I tell you I *read*. And we've got to do something. And I'll tell you why. The law cannot actually touch him. With Bayliss, it's either no witnesses or witnesses scared shitless, what with windows shot through or fist fights or phone calls at night or a brandished knife! With Bayliss, it's bail, and appeals, and change of venue and, no, there's *never* what the law calls probable cause! You've got to take the leadership position, Orus. You're the military hero.

ORUS. I'm no hero. Where are Emmett Korb, the Misses Mary and Martha Frank, and Ike Haley?

FRANCINE (*looks around*). We don't have a quorum. We *do* have a problem.

ORUS. We need the law.

FRANCINE. We don't need the law. We need justice. (*She and ORUS exit together.*)

(HAYDEN comes downstage, sees the bowl and the rag, picks them up, inspects the bowl, and reacts to the blood. Disgusted, he tosses the rag onto the harrow on CLAY's property and pours the blood onto it. He walks off. LIGHTS DOWN.)

SCENE 2

The evening of the next day. The weather is sultry. The living room of FRANCINE and ORUS. FRANCINE is working at her sewing table. The floor lamp stands next to her. Right now she isn't using the machine but is put-

ting finishing touches on ORUS' jacket by hand. ORUS enters.

FRANCINE. Orus, where've you been?

ORUS. I played a little cribbage at the American Legion Hall.

FRANCINE. You lose any money?

ORUS. I didn't do too badly.

FRANCINE. You lost money.

ORUS (*takes some change from his pocket*). We played for nickels.

FRANCINE. Aha. Losing nickels. If that is the full extent of your wickedness, Orus, I suppose I can put up with it.

ORUS (*looking at his change*). I'd like to be more wicked than that, if I could manage it. I lost my nickels to Otis. Otis. That is not life in the fast lane. (*Putting the change back in his pocket.*) A man my age should have achieved something considerably more wicked than that by now.

FRANCINE. Maybe you should increase your risk.

ORUS. Oh! What do you have in mind, young lady?

FRANCINE (*laughs*). Go all the way. Quit cribbage for nickels. Play dart baseball for dimes.

ORUS. Dart baseball! The mind reels. (*Beat.*) Dimes!

FRANCINE. With Calhoun.

ORUS. Calhoun! Oh, my. But Francine, Calhoun is not the one I want to play with. (*He extends his hand, inviting FRANCINE to dance.*)

FRANCINE. Oh. (*Accepting his invitation.*) Maybe you can lose two dollars. (*ORUS twirls FRANCINE. They dance a little—old-married-couple-style.*)

ORUS. I don't think I'll go that far. There is a difference between being reasonably wicked and taking up a full

scale life of crime. It's good to see you so relaxed, Francine.

FRANCINE. I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about.

ORUS. Let's take a trip!

FRANCINE. Took a trip last year.

ORUS. I mean far away. Europe.

FRANCINE. Oh. So you can collect more old junk.

ORUS. No. I got plenty of junk. What do you think?

FRANCINE. Clay Bayliss is not going to drive me away from my own home.

ORUS. I was glad to see you off that subject. (*The SOUND of the crunch of gravel.*)

FRANCINE (*listening*). Did you hear something?

ORUS. When?

FRANCINE. Just now! Out there. Gravel?

ORUS (*listens. Then carefully*). I would like you to forget him.

FRANCINE (*listening*). Well, *that!* Look out the window! (*ORUS crosses to the window and looks out. FRANCINE sits at her sewing table.*)

ORUS (*returning to FRANCINE*). There's nobody out there. (*Beat.*) If we take a trip, you and I...we could... get started...again. As man and wife. (*FRANCINE looks at him steadily.*) We'll have fun. We'll pretend we're newlyweds. I'll win your love. I'll capture one of those castles they got over there. We'll travel in railroad cars with brocade seats. I'll bribe a chef at a hotel and arrange for you to burn a breakfast, like a bride. How'd you like that? Smoke all over the place? A whole bunch of little French persons running around coughing? You're still so beautiful you make my chest ache. Fran-

cine? (*ORUS kneels next to FRANCINE.*) How'd you like for us to be in love again?

FRANCINE. Then run him off! (*A BLAST from a fully choked 20-gauge shotgun hits the floor lamp, knocking it over.*)

ORUS. God almighty! Get down!

FRANCINE. No, I won't.

(*SOUND of dogs barking. ORUS takes his lever-action rifle from its rack and chambers a round. ORUS and FRANCINE listen.*)

ORUS (*whispering*). Did you hear that?

FRANCINE (*whispering*). I don't hear anything. (*Pause.*) That was a shotgun blast, Orus. Right through the window.

ORUS. Yeah. Now is there going to be a second one. That's what we don't know. If there is— (*FRANCINE heads for the window.*) Francine, I would like you to get down.

FRANCINE. Not for anybody will I get down! (*Faint SOUND of a pickup truck.*) That's what he wants. To have us on our knees. In our own house. (*She crosses to the window and stands in front of it, defiantly. Shouting.*) Here! Bayliss! Here's something to shoot at.

ORUS (*protectively pulls FRANCINE behind him*). Get back! (*Clear SOUND of a pickup truck approaching.*)

FRANCINE. There's a truck coming.

ORUS (*aims his rifle at the sound*). Who's there? (*Silence.*) Who's there?

HAYDEN. It's me. Hayden.

FRANCINE (*relief*). Oh, God!

(HAYDEN EMORY enters. He's carrying a ratty old valise, but whatever its purpose was, it's been preempted by his shock on seeing the destruction.)

HAYDEN. What happened here?

FRANCINE. Someone just shot out our lamp, right through the window.

ORUS. Shotgun blast.

HAYDEN *(sets his valise down)*. Lord Almighty! Look at this mess! *(FRANCINE rights the lamp and shows HAYDEN the shot-through lampshade.)* He must've been pretty close! And choked down! Where were you, Francine?

FRANCINE. I was sitting right there.

HAYDEN. Well, that could have taken you right along with the lamp.

FRANCINE. It could have.

HAYDEN. When?

FRANCINE. Right now this minute. You could've hit him with your truck.

ORUS. Did you? See anyone?

HAYDEN. No.

FRANCINE. No. No one ever sees anyone in this town. It's a town of invisible beings. *(She exits.)*

(ORUS walks toward the source of the shot.)

HAYDEN. Orus, you're a damn fool if you go out there.

ORUS. I was thinking I'd check out those woods over by the old Bixby place.

HAYDEN. Well, you can call me a coward if you want, but I wouldn't go near those woods.

(FRANCINE returns with a dustpan and a whiskbroom. She begins to sweep up the broken glass.)

FRANCINE. It was over before we knew what hit us. He's already shot one man. And now this. We have got to stop him!

ORUS. We don't know who did it.

FRANCINE *(with an effort at control)*. Would you move your foot, Hayden? You're standing on a whole pile of glass. *(Grunting with the effort.)* I'm on my hands and knees in my own house.

HAYDEN *(pointing)*. There's some over here.

(FRANCINE gives HAYDEN a withering look.)

ORUS. We don't. For a fact. Know who did it.

FRANCINE. Oh, right. Sure. It must have been Donald Duck, then. Well, no one is driving me away. *(HAYDEN is using his handkerchief to remove the base of the broken bulb from the lamp.)* Hayden, you'll cut your finger.

ORUS. Switch it off. It's three-way, so click it once.

(HAYDEN gives up on the base.)

HAYDEN. You know that real fine hog I was going to use for siring? Well, it's been stolen. And killed, as a matter of fact. *(That gets FRANCINE's attention.)* I know who did it. A couple of us are going to meet at Rudy's place tomorrow after supper. They sent me over here to tell you in case you wanted to take part. In our discussion. Of what we're going to do.

FRANCINE. If anything. *(She exits with the broken glass.)*