



[Subscribe to All Content](#) [Subscribe to Daily Content](#)

Performance

LIES LIES LIES, YEAH

[Stacy Davies](#) Wed. April 29

Little Fish Theatre swims through the emotional waters of ‘Betrayal’



PHOTO COURTESY LITTLE FISH THEATRE

It’s always a risky endeavor when a small theater company takes on a familiar and much-lauded (and criticized) work by a master—and depending on the actors and what the space demands, audiences can often be left feeling empty-handed. San Pedro’s Little Fish Theatre has never shied away from a good challenge, however, and thanks to a discerning eye for directors, actors and material, it usually comes out on top. Such is the case with its current production of Harold Pinter’s ambiguous “memory play” *Betrayal*.

Considered one of the British playwright’s most adept works, the story focuses on an affair between Emma, who is married to Robert, and Robert’s best friend Jerry, who is also married. Emma and Jerry met secretly for seven years—but the affair has been over for two years by the time we meet them in 1977. There’s also another act of betrayal at work: Emma told Robert of the affair two years before it actually ended, but she did not tell her lover Jerry that Robert knew. Likewise, Robert never let on to his friend Jerry that he’d been found out; Jerry, therefore, has also been betrayed. The story then unfolds in reverse-ordered snapshots of poignant moments the three characters have shared, scenes in which each one is betrayed by the other.

With the reverse chronology (which occasionally kicks into forward gear) and all this betraying going on, things

could get muddy, but they don't. The plot line is simple, of course—an affair—but for some writers, the temptation to throw more wrenches into the gears to ramp things up and turn the story into some sad, screwy Neil Simon comedy might have been too much to resist. But Pinter's point is not to muss your head up with tangible things like reconstructed plot points or smoking guns—instead, he prefers to twist up your emotions. And he does.

Known for his economical use of language, Pinter only allows his characters to say what we actually need to hear—there are no lengthy dissertations on why anyone cheats or even how they feel about their cheating, and that's refreshing. He also gives them an abundance of pauses and gazes, and put together, these Spartan words and physical tools allow the actors to up the emotional ante of each scene much more effectively than if they were weighted down under a heap of rambling declarations and deflections. It also makes the story more accessible to us; what we are watching *seems* real, seems like how things are actually done, and most people watching will no doubt find reflections of their own deceptions—or at least of deceptions they've *thought* about committing.

Director Bert Pigg must have had a handle on the complex Pinter long ago—for his maneuvering of the actors and his understanding of the necessity of silence this play requires are crucial and brilliantly delivered. Likewise, Suzanne Dean (Emma), Matthew Brenher (Jerry) and Scott Hartman (Robert) seem tapped into their characters' very bloodlines, each actor so in synch with the others that their subtle complexities seep through their skins, melding together on stage into one turbulent stew of longing and lies.

And it is that effusion that's truly the key to the production. Unlike the dramatics in a typical American work, no one bursts into wailing tears in this story, and no one bellows with fiery anger. All is under the surface, heated, simmering, repressed—like so often in real life. And, as these characters discover, one of the repercussions of selfish acts can be a life of solitude, either emotionally or physically. The play doesn't offer any answers or warnings on this note, but it does make us wonder if we ever really betray others, or if we really just betray ourselves.

BETRAYAL THE LITTLE FISH THEATRE | 777 CENTRE ST | SAN PEDRO 90731 | 310.512.6030 | LITTLEFISHTHEATRE.ORG | WED-THURS 8PM; SUN 7PM THROUGH MAY 14 | \$20

Tags: [bert pigg](#), [betrayal](#), [harold pinter](#), [little fish theatre](#), [San Pedro](#)

 [ShareThis](#)

Ads by Google [House Play](#) [Theatre Events](#) [Play Set](#) [Divorce](#)

 [DISQUS](#) [COMMENT S](#)

Add New Comment

 Login



- Logged in as [AnonymousUser](#)
-  [Logout from Disqus](#)