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## Dramatizing Betrayal

Theater tackles Jan. 6 case that turned son against father

By **Bridgette M. Redman**  
Pasadena Weekly Contributor

In a world where it has become increasingly common for politics to drive a rift between family members, few stories are as dramatic as the one in which Jackson Reffitt turned his father in to the FBI over his participation in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol.

It's the sort of drama that makes for great theater, which is why Stephen Sachs is bringing it to The Fountain Theatre. "The Fatherland" is a piece of verbatim theater where all the text is pulled from public transcripts.

The world premiere runs through Saturday, March 30.

Guy Reffitt was the first defendant to

stand trial for the Jan. 6 insurrection. He was convicted, partly because of his son's emotional testimony, and sentenced to 7.25 years in prison. The story had immediate appeal to Sachs from when it hit the news. This past December, he discovered that all the court transcripts were available in the public domain because it was a federal case.

"I read the transcript of the son testifying against his father in that trial and I was just riveted by it," Sachs said. "I realized there's a play here. Then I read through the transcripts of the entire trial, and I began to collate them into the script. Every word from 'The Fatherland' is verbatim from either a court transcript, a case evidence or a public statement made by the son himself."

Sachs was determined to get the story on stage as quickly as possible because, as artistic director of The Fountain Theatre, he very much wanted the company to be a part of the national conversation surrounding the upcoming election. With the California primary taking place on March 5, his goal was to open the play before Los Angeles head to the polls.

While the play's dialog is 100% factual, the structure of the play is a nonlinear, non-naturalistic one. Sachs puts all the action into the hands of four actors playing the son (Patrick Keleher), the father (Ron Bottitta) and the two opposing attorneys (Anna Khaja and Larry Poindexter).

The set is limited to two tables and three chairs. It jumps back and forth between the courtroom and the Reffitt home.

When the father tells the story of his march on the Capitol, the audience travels with him to the scene so they can experience it with him. Even though the Fountain Theatre often makes use of video projections, Sachs decided against it for this production as he said everyone has seen the images over and over again.

"For this piece, I'm using sound as the primary storytelling device," Sachs said.

"So as the father tells the story of his march on Washington and climbing the Capitol steps and battling with the police, we're going to hear everything, not see it, and therefore we will create Jan. 6 in our minds. We've seen all those images and they are seared into our psyches. I don't think there's a reason to recreate that visually. I would much rather have the audience experience it viscerally through sound and create those images themselves."

While the story's content is overtly political and deals with the far-right militia movement and the influence of former president Donald Trump on the country, Sachs insists that this is as much a personal and family story as it is a political one.

"It's a father-son story and about betrayal," Sachs said. "It's political so it's large, but it's also very intimate about this father and son. To me, that makes it human and universal and identifiable. We have all read and seen a lot about Jan. 6 by now. But the part of the story that has not been told is the human story between family members and how this has not only shattered the country, but shattered families."

While the family was not involved in



Anna Khaja and Patrick Keleher act out a courtroom scene in "The Fatherland," in which Jackson Reffitt testifies against his father, Guy Reffitt.

(Grettel Cortes Photography/Submitted)

the creation of “The Fatherland,” Sachs plans to reach out to Jackson Reffitt and invite him to the show.

Jackson Reffitt knew something was going down even before the riots. He contacted the FBI and told them what he knew from text exchanges in the family. After the riot, when his father started to hear about people getting turned in, he said to his 18-year-old son and his 15-year-old daughter that they would be traitors if they turned him in and that “traitors get shot.”

Jackson Reffitt did so anyway, secretly taping conversations with his father and turning them into the FBI. Guy Reffitt was the first person to refuse a plea bargain, even though it would have given him a shorter sentence, and went to trial where his son testified against him.

Sachs said that he hopes “The Fatherland” will help people see the human stories behind the headlines. He points out that Jackson Reffitt’s action required great

sacrifice.

“The heartbeat of this play is his vulnerability and his courage,” Sachs said of Jackson Reffitt. “His father was arrested in 2021 and the next time he was to see his father was one year later and that was in the courtroom as he testified against him. The case attracted national attention, the son was getting death threats, he had to move out of his house, he’s been sequestered by the government for his own protection and he shattered his family.”

When he was taken into the courtroom a year after last seeing his father, he was brought in to testify and he looked across the courtroom and made eye contact with his dad.

“Then the lawyer begins with ‘tell us what you know’ and he has to begin and tell this story,” Sachs said. “It’s a tremendous act of courage. There were many heroes on Jan. 6, and I think that this son was one of them.” ■

#### “The Fatherland”

**WHEN:** Various times through Saturday, March 30

**WHERE:** The Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Avenue, Los Angeles

**COST:** Tickets start at \$25

**INFO:** 323-663-1525, [www.fountaintheatre.com](http://www.fountaintheatre.com)



**Patrick Keleher, left, plays Jackson Reffitt, the son who turned his father, played by Ron Boffita, right, in to the FBI over his involvement in the Jan. 6 insurrection.**

*(Grettel Cortes Photography/Submitted)*