

REVIEW

Matt Chiorini Returns 'Pseudo'-Triumphantly to Tennessee Rep's SANTALAND DIARIES

By: **Jeffrey Ellis**, *Broadway World Review*

November 21, 2011

It's really kind of ironic that last Friday, the New York City studios of *One Life to Live* – ABC's venerable soap opera – were shuttered, and on the following evening Tennessee Repertory Theatre unveiled its 2011 production of *The Santaland Diaries*, the stage adaptation of [David Sedaris](#)'s ridiculously funny and hopelessly skewed remembrance of his time spent as an Elf at Macy's Herald Square. For it is in Santaland that David confesses that he came to NYC in hopes of fame and fortune, possible only if he could be cast on *One Life to Live*. Sedaris, you see, idolizes Victoria Buchanan and all the other denizens of Llanview and it was their trials and tribulations that helped him make it through Efdom without being arrested.

Therefore, I propose a moment of silence in honor of *One Life to Live* and in honor of [David Sedaris](#)'s wickedly funny, totally apropos holiday season tale that is brought to life at TPAC's [Andrew Johnson Theatre](#) by [Matt Chiorini](#), returning to the role he's played to critical acclaim and audience delight at least twice previously.

Directed by [David Alford](#), who certainly knows his way around the breakroom (what with his own experiences playing Crumpet the elf, Sedaris' velvet smock/candy can tights-wearing doppelganger), *The Santaland Diaries* is the perfect seasonal antidote for the countless, treacly-sweet productions of *A Christmas Carol* that will dominate the Nashville theatrical landscape over the coming weeks.

While those more sentimental theater offerings would offer up cookies and milk for [Santa Claus](#)' tree-side repast, *The Santaland Diaries* would leave some bong-water and pork rinds for the rotund interloper who, let's face it, is guilty of breaking and entering every home all over the world on Christmas Eve. The truth can be hard, people.

Chiorini gives a wonderfully droll performance as David as he takes us on his journey of self-discovery – albeit the discovery of Christmastime greed and avarice among the teeming hordes of retail shoppers – and displays his command of the material along with his tremendous stage presence, which ensures a good time will be had by all (“fuckety-fuck-fuck-fuck”). With his no-holds-barred delivery, Chiorini remains charming and engaging, drawing his audience into his onstage shenanigans which some might find dated – he reminds us the script was written in 1989, after all – but is, in reality, as timeless as that whole “Night Before

Christmas” crap we’ve been reciting for a century or two.

Let me tell you, [David Sedaris](#)’ experience as an elf at Macy’s rings just as true today as it ever did and I speak from personal, mind-numbing experience (I spent seven years retailing it up at Macy’s and, believe me, customers are at their worst during the holidays—if I had a dollar for every time I muttered an expletive under my breath when faced by a rude, demanding “client,” I’d be so freaking rich, I wouldn’t be trying to find new and unique ways to describe a show I’ve seen 5,000 times!) that his little diatribe is just as funny as it ever was.

Credit goes to the self-assured Chiorini for keeping the material fresh, biting and entertaining. He relates the expected tales with unexpected flashes of humorous genius and pacing, making Sedaris’ story his own in the process. And credit director Alford with capturing the script’s gleefully targeted barbs in an appealing fashion, giving Chiorini the freedom to work the room with skillful ease, like a Santaland elf who’s been hit the bong two or three times too many.

Tennessee Rep’s [Gary Hoff](#) repurposes his A Christmas Story (that show plays the venue December 8-22) set to great effect for The Santaland Diaries and Lane Fragomeli still fits Chiorini nicely and fits Crumpet in outlandish, but appropriate, fashion. [Michael Barnett](#)’s lighting design helps the audience to focus their attention where it needs to be directed and Steve Lepley’s original props design is wonderfully over-the-top.

- The Santaland Diaries. By [David Sedaris](#). Adapted for the stage by [Joe Mantello](#). Directed by [David Alford](#). Presented by Tennessee Repertory Theatre, through December 3, at TPAC’s [Andrew Johnson Theatre](#), Nashville. For details, go to www.tennesseeep.org.

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