

# Los Angeles Times



## The Spotlight: James Roday

*The star of USA's 'Psych' is directing RED DOG SQUADRON's play 'greedy' at El Centro Theatre.*

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As fake psychic Shawn Spencer on USA's hit comic procedural "Psych," James Roday uses his keen powers of observation to solve crimes in scenic Santa Barbara, nickname his long-suffering partner, Gus (Dulé Hill), and riff on '80s pop culture.

Off screen, the Texas-born Roday acts, directs and writes for RED DOG SQUADRON,

the theater company he founded with fellow New York University alum Brad Raider. RED DOG gave us last year's not-so-tender love story "Extinction" and now serves up "greedy," a dark comedy about marriage, black market babies and Nazi paraphernalia. We checked in with Roday, 34, at El Centro Theatre, where he's directing "greedy," which features Maggie Lawson, his "Psych" costar (Juliet) and real-life girlfriend.

**You once described "Psych" as the following: "Take 'The Mentalist,' add a black guy and about 75% more jokes." Pitch "greedy" in a similar fashion.**

Take the Nigerian e-mail scam epidemic, make it Russian, add five human beings in various forms of discontent, add hope, subtract hope, get greedy.

**"greedy" is definitely a recession play.**

There are haves and have-nots. But is the idea of "rich" ultimately based on money? There's an interesting conversation between one of the couples, Paul and Tatiana. He says: "You have to help people in trouble no matter what." She says: "I don't love you enough for you to be poor." I want to say to the audience, "Don't pick a side yet. You might find yourself really surprised."

**Is there any "Psych"-style whisper-bickering?**

As much as I love "Psych," my sensibility is much darker than what we do on the show. RED DOG allows me to explore that. Although I did add an Emilio Estevez joke to the play. It was bigger than I was.

**Maggie Lawson, who plays Juliet O'Hara on "Psych," is also stepping out of character — as well as some of her clothes. Her character, Keira, spends a lot of time half-dressed.**

Keira is reptilian. The thinking man's survivor. The same rules apply for Maggie here as for me: "greedy" is an opportunity to do something very different than "Psych."

**"greedy" premiered at New York's Clubbed Thumb in 2007. Did playwright Karl Gajdusek do any rewriting for RED DOG's production?**

I did push Karl to make changes in the second act. We lengthened the arc by quite a bit. It sounds crazy, but I often work backwards. I had the last minute and a half in my

head from the beginning. Then it was like, if I can just get the rest of the show to match that last punchy tableaux.... I said to our sound designer today, "What do you think about charging people half as much just to see the last minute and a half? And then leave?"

**You did attend New York University's Experimental Theatre Wing. What monologues did you audition with?**

The soda shop scene in "Our Town," and Hamlet's "Get thee to a nunnery."

**Kinda stuck with the classics.**

Well, I'd just done "Hamlet" so I was pretty sure I had the lines down.

**What's the different between doing theater in L.A. versus NYC?**

You get away with a lot more in L.A. because no one's playing attention. Not having to pay for things. Cheating your way around royalties. There's not a microscope on you here. We have a hall pass until someone catches on.

**There's a lot of argument about the quality of L.A. theater. Discuss.**

The key is not to create unrealistic expectations. Until there is enough consistently good theater, whether you see the show at El Centro or the Blank, we'll be fighting a certain perception. In New York, you can see four bad shows in a row and you don't hold it against the community. Here, you see two bad shows in a row and you won't go again until someone you know is in a play.

**What's the solution?**

Companies should collaborate more. The notion of competition in theater in this town is ridiculous. You see another company doing great work and the response should be, "What can we do to help?" The theater community here is always going to be a small one. You can only change the culture one show at a time.

At the El Centro Theatre through Jan. 29.