

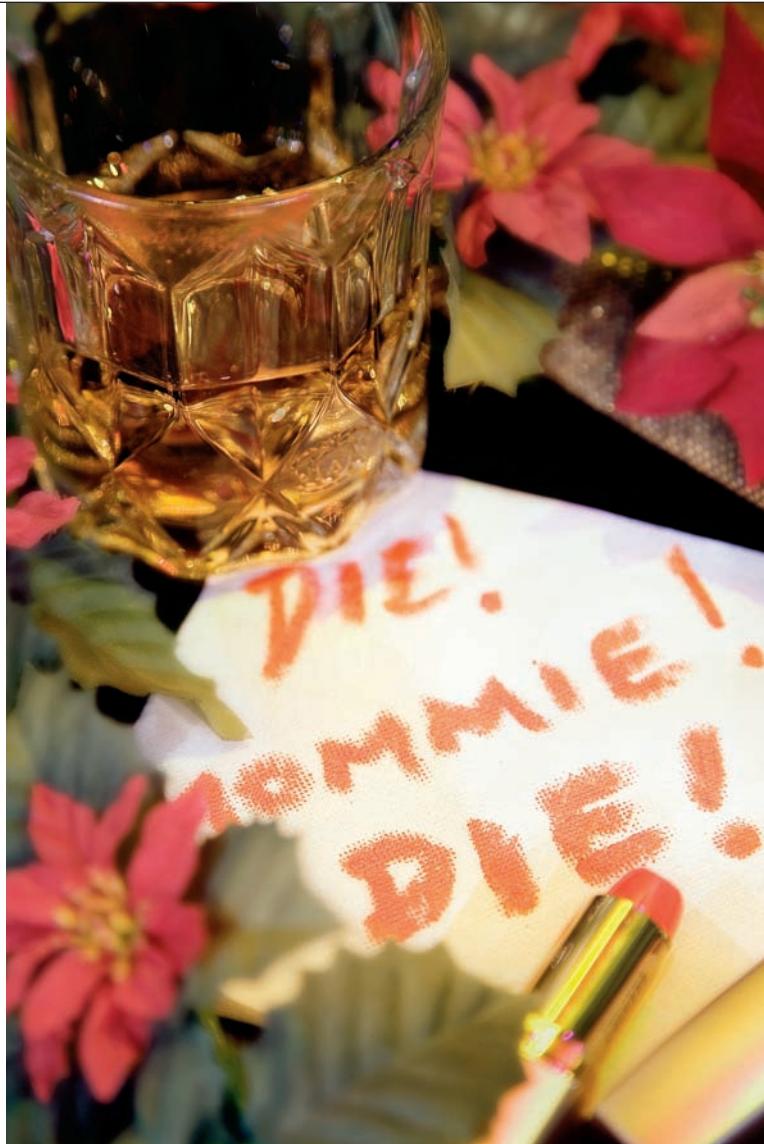
Everyone forgets that the holidays are the darkest days of the year—literally. Even in sunny California, the days grow shorter, leaving everyone with less time. Those families on TV are smiling, gleefully chirping about the hap-hap-happy holidays, and you're sitting next to the aluminum Christmas tree with a stack of presents, fist clenched around a pair of scissors, curling ribbons that'll just be ignored.

No one appreciates your hard work. You bring warm milk to your ailing husband, and he waves you away. The gall! Thinking about everything you've sacrificed for him—for those kids!—you could just scream. Or stab someone. Or tip poison into their drink. Or maybe spike their tea with LSD, sending them on the trip of a lifetime. Oh, the sweet, psychedelic possibilities!

After the success of last year's production of *The SantaLand Diaries*, David Sedaris' sardonic unveiling of what it's *really* like to be Santa's helper, Stray Dog Theatre artistic director Gary Bell knew he'd tapped into a deep, dark vein. People practically demanded a release amid the madness of the holidays.

"All the people on South Grand were like, 'We're buying tickets forever to your winter show, 'cause we just can't deal with it anymore, all the jingle bell jingle bells and all the kids and the crying.' It's just too much. Many people—I would say a good 70 percent—said do it again next year," says Bell. "And I said, 'Well, that's a little easy. I'll do something else. Not to say we won't bring *SantaLand* back, but let's try something else and see what happens.'"

That something else is playwright Charles Busch's *Die! Mommie! Die!*, a twisted, gender-bending comedy sendup of the family life of a classic,



Sunshine, Lollipops and ... Revenge?

Stray Dog's devilish holiday romp brings light to the darker side of the '60s By Margaret Bauer

under mysterious circumstances, Angela announces her intentions to start a new life—only to be cornered by those pesky kids, who, in a turn reminiscent of Greek tragedy, demand vengeance for their father's demise.

What happens next is anyone's game. "People aren't going to have any idea what's really going to happen until they see it," says Crain. "When I first sat down and read it through, I knew what she was, I knew that character. But I had no idea where I was headed. And as I'm reading, I'm thinking, 'Ohhh my God.' People won't see it comin'."

Stray Dog Theatre's Die! Mommie! Die! runs December 4 to 20 at Tower Grove Abbey, 2336 Tennessee. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors and students. Call 314-865-1995 or visit straydogtheatre.com for reservations. For mature audiences only.