

## “Moonlight” Delivers Laughs

### Moonlight and Magnolias Plays at the Lafayette Town Hall Theatre

By Cathy Tyson



Michael Patrick Gaffney playing legendary producer David O. Selznick in Town Hall's Moonlight and Magnolias Photo provided

“Moonlight and Magnolias” is a hilarious look at the backstage story of *Gone With the Wind* (GWTW). As the curtain rises, the audience sees the interior of David O. Selznick’s office circa 1939. Michael Patrick Gaffney, who plays Mr. Selznick in all of his agitated glory, reveals a complex character, part megalomaniac, part persuasive charmer. Having recently fired George Cukor as director and unhappy with the latest of many versions of the complex script, Selznick is desperate to get the picture back on track, or risk financial ruin.

That’s where the fun begins. Although the play by Ron Hutchinson borrows heavily from real life, GWTW actually was put on hold for two weeks; he took some dramatic liberties to pump up the story. The play takes place entirely in the movie mogul’s inner sanctum where our three main characters, Selznick, Director Victor Fleming - pulled off of the soon to wrap *The Wizard of Oz* and Screenplay Writer Ben Hecht, are locked-in for five long days to save the movie. In real life, they were allowed to leave, and didn’t have only bananas and peanuts for sustenance.

Highlights include the characters portraying GWTW scenes in order to hash out the hopefully new and improved script. Victor Fleming, played by Patrick Edwards, had the audience in stitches as

he portrayed Melanie giving birth on the sofa. Gaffney as Selznick, alternating between Scarlett O’Hara, Ashley Wilkes and Prissy, brought the house down. Elias Escobedo as Ben Hecht notes that he hasn’t read the book, and keeps reminding us that no Civil War movie ever made money. The trio gave new meaning to slapstick as they “practiced” Scarlett slapping Prissy from a number of angles, while wrestling with the dilemma of a white woman abusing her African American underage maid.

“Yes Mr. Selznick,” is the common refrain of stylish Meghann May, who plays Miss Poppenghul, the very efficient assistant to the man in charge. At one point, as delirium sets in on day five, she appears in a dream as Scarlett to our three amigos.

Artistic Director Kevin Morales not only does a great job with the cast, but he also has a link to Victor Fleming; he’s his great nephew. Playwrite Ron Hutchinson gave him special permission to produce the play.

The second act loses a little momentum as the campy comedy gives way to serious political topics like acceptance of successful Jews along with straight man Hecht worrying about moral obligations and parallels between the Civil War and Nazi Germany. Valid points to be sure, but frankly my dear, they feel a little out of place in this rollicking farce.

On the whole, a wonderful production right in our own backyard. Moonlight and Magnolias runs through March 15 at the Town Hall Theatre 3535 School Street, Lafayette, for more information, go to [www.thtc.org](http://www.thtc.org).