

Published October 1st, 2008

Town Hall Theater's The Graduate - An Evening of Nostalgia

By *Sophie Braccini*

Dennis Markham as Ben and Xanadu Bruggers as Elaine in "The Graduate" Photo courtesy of Town Hall Theater

There are benchmark stories that are must-sees at different stages of life. For the Baby Boomers who first saw "The Graduate" when the movie came out in 1967, revisiting the story is more than a stroll down memory lane, it is a paradigm shift. Today, instead of identifying with Ben Braddock or Elaine Robinson, we may wonder which of our children will most resemble those characters. The Town Hall Theater's new Artistic Director, Clive Worsley, brings the stage adaptation of The Graduate to Lafayette. "Most of us are familiar with the movie," says Worsley, "the stage play was made in 2000 for Kathleen Turner. Even though the story is set in the 60's, love, desire, family relationship, expectation on how we should live our lives are still relevant today and the production is very fresh."

The play opened on September 13th and will run for five weeks. It's a challenge for the actors to step into the big shoes of Anne Bancroft, Dustin Hoffman and Katharine Ross. Some are right on target, like Melissa Myers who plays a very powerful Mrs. Robinson, cynical to the bone, or Sally Hogarty and Jerry Motta as clueless suburban parents. At the time of the preview, some of the other actors had not yet hit the mark. There is hope that these talented performers will master their characters over the weeks of the performance.

Director Joel Roster was very successful in creating a rapid succession of set designs manipulated by the stage crew, a group of Lafayette teens who have been trained by professionals. Beds become couches; tables appear and disappear, doors are moved to create different spaces. These swift transformations take place during the delightful musical interlude provided by singer and guitar player April Kavanagh.

Kavanagh, a charming musician, set the perfect mood for the entire evening. Sitting at the edge of the stage, the case of her guitar laid open with a few dollar bills inside suggesting donations, she brings

back the musical tempo of the time: beautiful songs by Simon and Garfunkel, inserted perfectly throughout the play. "We all know the title songs," says Worsley, "the voice of Paul Simon reflects this period of history and each song resonates in its own way, and deepens the conversation with the audience."

The play resonates with the Lamorinda audience and their life experience. "A play is a way to see our own experience reflected on the stage, an understanding about our own lives," believes Worsley. Down the line, Worsley's ambition is to see Town Hall become the artistic and cultural center for Lamorinda. "We are making high quality classical and contemporary art form available to the community," he says. In the short term he will be bringing new voices and further the dialogue between the theater and the community. Residents are likely to see surveys, focus groups, and Town Hall in the schools.

The Graduate will be playing until October 11th, tickets are \$18-\$32. Call 283-1557 or go to www.thtc.org. This play is not recommended for children under 12.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA