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It's a Wonderful Life at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



George Bailey (Dan Saski) and Clarence Odbody (Tom Flynn) Photos Stu Selland

While Scrooge was a Town Hall Theatre favorite of holidays past, the stage adaptation of Frank Capra's classic film *It's a Wonderful Life* which opened Nov. 29 promises a production as successful and popular as the Dickens' classic.

Almost everyone knows the story of resilience and faith, based on the short story "The Greatest Gift," written by Philip Van Doren Stern, that became a winter staple long after its initial release in 1946. A drama more than a comedy, *It's a Wonderful Life* does not hesitate to dwell in the darkest corners of the human soul; it talks of greed, selfishness and treason. The story also explores how to deal with life when big dreams must be scaled down. But its charm comes from showing the difference one decent human being can make, and that the good you do can one day come back to you.

In spite of all the hype in our culture around material success, the appeal of the story about what it means to be truly happy, have a sense of purpose in one's life, and be part of a community, has endured for more than 60 years.

The stage version is true to the movie and Lisa Anne Porter, who directs this production, found ways to capture the audience within the limits of community theater. Porter

decided to make it obvious to the audience that actors are putting on a show - the actors are present on stage, sitting in chairs, their backs to the audience, before turning around and jumping into the action. At first it seems a bit odd and artificial, but in the end it works beautifully.

The cast includes 15 talented actors, ages 9 to 70, many of whom play more than one role. "We auditioned many actors and did a lot of call-backs. We auditioned people individually and in groups; we had to get the right dynamic," says Porter, who has directed for Town Hall Theatre Company before (*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and as co-director of *Proof*). She knows local actors well, yet many in the cast are new to her.

"We auditioned Dan Saski to play George Bailey among others, and kept calling him back, each time saying 'He is George!'" says Porter. Saski is indeed a very good cast for the main character. He even has the Jimmy Stewart look, something sweet in the face, a mixed feeling of strength and vulnerability. Lauren Rosi is a very lively and charming Mary, second class angel Clarence Odbody is nicely captured by Tom Flynn, and Randy Anger is villain enough to be a despicable Mr. Potter.

"My first memory of the movie was on a Christmas Eve when I was 12 and found myself alone in my aunt's house," remembers Porter. "I turned on the TV and was captivated by the movie I had never seen before. I thought I had discovered something special and was surprised that everyone already knew it. I've always remembered the magic of that first time." Porter brings this magic to the stage, and audience members are sure to leave Town Hall Theatre with happy hearts, filled with optimism and joy.

Performances continue through Dec. 16. For more information and tickets, visit www.townhalltheatre.com.



Mary Bailey (Lauren Rosi) and George Bailey (Dan Saski)

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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