

Published April 24th, 2013

## SMC Production Deftly Tackles Tough Topics

By Lou Fancher



Saint Mary's College cast rehearses "Lie of the Mind." Photo Andy Scheck

what has happened in a 25-year old relationship; there's a woman who's been beaten nearly to death saying, "'He is my heart,' about her attacker," Murray says.

At the play's center are Jake and Beth, a married couple whose difficulties have pinnacleed at the depths of a life-threatening beating the young husband has avenged upon his spouse. They've retreated to their separate families; not so much for recovery as to gird their loins and lingering animosity for post-trauma life.

"It's a play about theater as much as it's about two families. It says to us, 'What does theater do for us?'" Murray suggests.

In addition, he might be asking the young actors a related question: "What does biting into a world of contrasts-dark/light, lies/truth, male/female, hate/love, laugh/cry, forgive/resent-teach you about yourself and your world?"

And in program notes, Murray breaks the "fourth wall" of theater to pose questions for the audience: "What secrets do we harbor? What damage are we willing to do in the name of bending reality to our desire? How do we learn to tell the truth when it is so painful?"

It sounds arduous, but fortunately Shepard is around to save the day and swoop us into high humor with brilliant, plain-speaking language. The script is not belly laughter inducing; instead, its dry wit tends to sneak in at the edges, ruffling funny-bone feathers just enough to cause a knowing smile.

"I'm not going to fight with you. I didn't come back for that," the actor playing Sally says to her brother, Jake. "Oh, why not? What else are we gonna do?" he replies.

With proper timing, the line is funny and reveals in a mere nine words a lifetime of sibling rivalry, bickering and contradictory collusion.

"What (a character) is saying doesn't go along with what is happening," Murray says. "The love is fractured by violence, but the way they talk about each other is all about deep connection."

Adding to the characters' haunting, fractured internal worlds is a broken, lattice-style set by Michael Cook. The impression it makes is worn and layered and stripped of pretense, despite the skirted easy chair and mildly oriental rug. A rifle is mounted above the door; a nearby, seriously-large deer's rack suggests a hunter is willing to shoot to kill.

But what these families want, along with relief from their miseries, is to be heard and understood. It's a universal desire, an international pastime. And Shepard is at his best: constructing a play capturing both the pathos and the ironic pathway out of self-centric existence.

"What the play tells us is that we have to get outside of ourselves in order to experience ourselves," Murray concludes. "For those who can, they have a chance."

"Lie of the Mind" opens tonight and runs through Saturday, April 27 with shows at 7 p.m., and a matinee at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 28 at the Saint Mary's College LeFevre Theatre. For more information and reservations call the Saint Mary's College Theatre Box Office at (925) 631-4670. Tickets are also available online at [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com).

Saint Mary's College Associate Professor Frank Murray has no fear.

What else would cause a theater director working since 1988 in the performing arts division of a small, private college to stage playwright Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind," a blistering, inextricably tangled tale of two families?

Perhaps Murray would prefer "courageous" to "no fear,"-which leads directly to the crux of the play's attraction for Murray and long-term fans of Shepard's hypnotic wordsmithing: language.

"I wrote my dissertation on Beckett and Shepard," Murray says, in an interview prior to the eight-member cast's second-half run-through.

Murray saw the last show of the original 1985 play's run in New York, where it ran nearly five hours and he says, was "at times, excruciatingly slow." SMC's version is the revised, just-under-three hour production.

Yet the function of "Lie's" language, how it butts up and wrestles against the action, despite the lengthy delivery he experienced in 1986, fascinated him.

"It think there's disorientation caused (by the words).

There's simultaneous past and present; there's not seeing

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