

“American Night” a Satirical Collection of Fun at Cal Shakes

By Lou Fancher

Cal Shakes careens into the 2013 outdoor summer theater season at Orinda's Bruns Amphitheater with Richard Montoya's pumped-up “American Night: the Ballad of Juan José,” directed by the company's artistic director, Jon Moscone. A little slapstick, a lot pop culture and liberally splattered with humorous, intentional offense, the massive series of vignettes is mostly held together by the considerable talents of the cast. If the play at times feels disjointed, the actors are thoroughbreds; swift, smooth, powerful.

The story, developed by San Francisco's Culture Clash, a repository for Chicano comedic theater founded in 1984, travels through the needs and wants of Juan José (Sean San José), a man intent on U.S. citizenship. It would be a straight-up his-

tory lesson, except for the fact he's overdosed on studying and falls – literally, with upturned desk and thunderous sound effects – into a surreal, looping dream.

He's met by assault of every inconceivable kind. Mexican officials offer a bribe (drug money), Latter Day Saints offer a bribe (their bibles), pen-waving bureaucrats offer a bribe (sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, annex Oregon!) and more. Chief among the “motivators” is his profoundly pregnant wife, Lydia, and their shared fantasy about American freedom.

And predictably, chasing the illusive illusion involves time travel encounters with familiar, but decidedly ramped up folks, like a gun-toting Teddy Roosevelt, a Sacagawea in hot pink tights, a Ku Klux Klansman and



Sean San José as Juan José and Richard Ruiz as Teddy Roosevelt in Cal Shakes' "American Night: The Ballad of Juan José" by Richard Montoya, directed by Jonathan Moscone. Photo Kevin Berne

his KKK-swaddled infant, and Joan Baez and Bob Dylan – “You should have taken the drug money,” a pot-smoking Dylan advises José.

One of the show's delights is how it tears up the history books, not just with satire, but with pen-it-in additions as it brings out little-known-but-true stories like that of Viola Pettus, an African-American nurse who fearlessly treated anyone sickened by the 1918 flu pandemic and Ralph Lazo, who voluntarily incarcerated himself in the Manzanar internment camp to support his Japanese friends.

If the script's Google references and Obama inserts fall flat and are over-worn, the remaining humor's bite adds enough snap to keep the dialogue fresh. Actors tend to pick up the pace as a play runs; this one needs to fly swiftly to stay aloft.

José (the actor, not the character) is so finely cast in his role, one could almost miss exactly why. It's not his disarming humility – although it adds to his charm – it's plain old solid technique. Never dropping a line; consistently cycling through an escalating build-destroy-build pattern; often massaging his delivery to intensify his fellow actors' personas – his performance is worth the ticket price alone,

forgiving the tired compliment.

But to overlook the remarkable craft of the ensemble sharing José's spotlight would be a mistake. Dan Hiatt is all grand mannerism and convincing pomposity in a number of roles; Sharon Lockwood makes one wish there were a half-dozen more roles for her to explode to hilarious effect (the Danville blond is the ultimate); and Tyee Tilghman graces the stage with fiendish likability and other mixed/meaty portrayals. Margo Hall, Richard Ruiz, Todd Nakagawa and Brian Rivera shine in a blizzard of behaviorally challenged characters. Dena Martinez imbues her multiple roles and shows her range with everything from insouciance to heightened hysteria.

Costumes are as much a part of the show's success as the actors and Martin Schnellinger's ability to deliver a pun through textiles is exceptional. If it's possible to sew ignorant aura into a uniform, he's done it. Set Designer Eric Flatmo's corrugated steel walls, spiraling barbed wire and pumped-color billboard backdrops provide a stripped-down visual playground for Cal Shake's jostling production. If there are holes in the narrative fabric, strong acting and

Moscone's deft touch with the disparate elements deliver plenty of food for thought and fun for all.

“American Night: the Ballad of Juan José,” presented by California Shakespeare Theater, runs through June 23 at the Bruns Amphitheater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way (off Highway 24), Orinda. For information, call (510) 548-9666 or visit www.calshakes.org.



Tyee Tilghman as Ben Pettus and Margo Hall as Viola Pettus in Cal Shakes' "American Night: The Ballad of Juan José" by Richard Montoya, directed by Jonathan Moscone. Photo Kevin Berne

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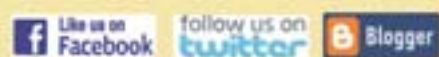
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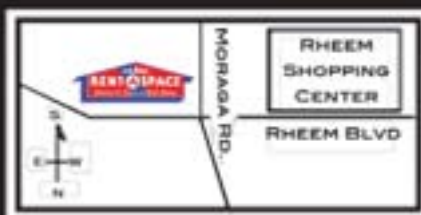


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Lyme Disease in Lamorinda? Not Likely

By Cathy Dausman



In California, *Ixodes pacificus* is the only tick that transmits Lyme disease to people. Photo provided

Is Lyme disease, the most common vector-borne disease in the U.S. likely in Lamorinda? Not if you look at the numbers. Just five cases of Lyme disease were reported among the one million-plus residents of Contra Costa County between 2001 and 2011, although ticks in 42 counties in California were themselves infected. Only western black legged ticks carry Lyme disease, which causes fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic skin rash called erythema migrans. Left untreated, it can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system.

“We haven't heard anything specific about Lyme disease, but we test for it quite often,” said veterinarian Jamie Peyton, of Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette. “I don't know the numbers for this area, but I suspect the condition is under diagnosed in both animals and people in Northern California.”

But take heart—in order to infect someone with Lyme disease, the western black legged tick must first be infected itself. Ticks acquire the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the cause of Lyme disease, by feeding on infected mammals. Larval, nymph and adult ticks can pass Lyme disease on through their bite, but larva rarely bite and as little as 15 percent of

nymphs and only 5 percent of adult ticks are infected. Dr. Abigail Kroch, Director of Epidemiology, Planning & Evaluation for Contra Costa County Health Services said: “We do not have enough reported cases to detect a trend.”

Kroch also pointed out that although an infection is reported in Contra Costa County, the patient may have contracted the disease elsewhere. First discovered near Lyme, Conn., some 40 years ago, the disease made its way westward. California reported its first case of Lyme disease in 1978 when a Sonoma county hiker was infected. The state now averages 100 case reports per year, compared with approximately 2,000 cases reported nationwide.

So, enjoy that summer hike, but take precautions. The California Department of Public Health suggests you stay on the trail. Wear light-colored clothes, a hat, long sleeved shirt and pants. Tuck in shirts and tuck pant legs into boots or socks. Treat clothing with permethrin insecticide, and apply DEET repellent to exposed skin. Thoroughly inspect for ticks and tick bites after being in tick habitat. If bitten, promptly and carefully remove the tick, and clean the area with soap and water.

Dead or live ticks can be tested for *Borrelia* at many local health departments. Preserve ticks moist in a small container. If you develop any symptoms up to one month after a bite, consult your physician, and explain that you were bitten by a tick.

To find out more about Lyme disease in California, call (916) 552-9730 or visit the California Department of Public Health website: www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/Pages/LymeDisease.aspx.