

New Town Hall Theatre Artistic Director Named

By Sophie Braccini



New Artistic Director Derrick Silva.

Photo Sophie Braccini

When Derrick Silva enters a room, the new Town Hall Theatre artistic director radiates a friendly and smooth presence. He was an instant member of the THT family.

Silva is no stranger to the THT directing team. All had worked for or with him in his previous position as artistic director of the Contra Costa Civic Theater in El Cerrito. Silva said he has never sought directing jobs; he has always been asked to direct. When former director Clive Worsley decided to pursue an opportunity at Cal Shakes, he sent an email to Silva saying he'd be perfect for the THT job.

On Aug. 10 Silva was formerly presented to the THT community. He will be directing THT with the choices made by his predecessor for the 2013/14 season, but he is eager to make his mark and grow the theater's audience in the years to come.

Silva was born and raised in El Sobrante where he still lives. The youngest of eight children, there was no money left in the family's savings when it was his turn to go to college, so he started working in IT, first in clerical positions, then training on the job and working his way up to managing customer support and training for Remedy (now part of BMC Software).

All the while since high school, Silva was on stage performing and singing. "My first role was Doody in one of the first stage productions of 'Grease,'" he said.

People encouraged him to continue auditioning and he got more roles. "I never had any formal theatrical training. Then I kept getting new offers for directing shows. I guess I have a knack for it," he said with a big smile and no trace of arrogance.

During the years that he performed and progressively directed, he continued to work in IT until CCCT offered him the artistic director position. "It was more than a full time job for part-time pay," he says with a smile, "but I could afford to make that choice and loved doing it."

Silva says that by the second and third years he was in charge, the season subscriptions rose by 22 percent and the third year reported the largest

sales in CCCT's 53-year history.

"The recipe for success is to produce shows that, in addition to production value, move people, and make them feel something," said Silva. "There is a wonderful place in each program for pieces that appeal intellectually to people, but that does not necessarily sell tickets. If you feel something, you're more likely to come back or bring someone else with you."

Silva does not think that "making them laugh" is the only way to move people. "Some of my best successes [at CCCT] were directed by THT's professionals," he said, noting plays directed by Joel Roster and Dennis Markam. "They are some of the most talented people in the area. So when Clive contacted me for the job, I was very humbled."

Silva said that Roster also called him and gave him 100 percent support. "Part of what made me think I would enjoy working here was the way Clive treated us as actors when I came to participate in 'The Farnsworth Invention,'" added Silva. "I was hesitant because I put the talent in this building on a pedestal, but we share the same human values, we treat people with respect. That's what Clive has done, and what I will continue to do. An artistic director leads a community; this is my large family, and that makes me tremendously happy."

Silva said that in his opinion, today, THT reaches only 40 percent of its potential audience and he has every intention of growing the numbers.

"Lafayette has a perfect location for attracting an audience beyond Lamorinda," he said. "Our education program is amazing and already attracts people from afar."

One of his favorite genres is the musical, and THT's board confirmed that people want to see more of that. While Silva said it costs more, he has a strong background in this area and it is likely that in the years to come, THT will resonate with the sound of music.

To get more information about THT's upcoming season, visit www.thtc.org.

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Lamorinda Weekly

is an independent publication, produced by and for the residents of Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, CA

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Publishers/Owners: Andy and Wendy Scheck; andy@lamorindaweekly.com; wendy@lamorindaweekly.com
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Circulation: 26,600 printed copies; delivered to homes & businesses in Lamorinda.

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Layout/Graphics: Andy Scheck, Jaya Griggs.
Printed in CA.

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