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"The Rainmaker" at Town Hall Theatre Now through Oct. 5

By Sophie Braccini



Caitlin Evenson as Lizzie Curry and Joel Roster as Bill Starbuck Photo Stu Selland

It's about a drought and about taking chances. "The Rainmaker," the N. Richard Nash play brought to Lamorinda by Town Hall Theatre Company, and directed by Derrick Silva, is the story of a group of townspeople who finally reveal their emotions, like dry flower buds blooming after the first rain, when the Rainmaker - part con-artist, part poet - crosses their path. The group of chosen actors is excellent, and even if the season was shaped by Clive Worsley before the new artistic director's arrival, Silva has risen to the occasion with an emotional and lovable performance.

"The author does not give a time or specific location where the action is taking place," says Silva. "Some of the context shows that it is somewhat in our past, but it could be any time, really. A time when people lose hope, settle and fall asleep in an unsatisfying reality that dries out their youth and desire to fully live."

The role of Lizzie Curry, the unmarried daughter in the central family of four, is probably the one most affected by the drought. In the 1956 film adaptation of the play, Katharine Hepburn received a Best Actress Oscar nomination for her performance as Lizzie - a young woman who is a bit too smart for her own good, and who has let her charm be drawn from her by the reality of a physique that's more plain than stunning. It is not an easy role for an actress. In Lafayette, Caitlin Evenson infuses the role with sensitivity and emotion. There are times when her pleas break the spectator's heart, when her hopes lift it up; when she finally dances, one wants to dance with her.

Joel Roster is Bill Starbuck, the rainmaker. The character's cockiness is a bit annoying at first, but Roster gradually reveals Starbuck's loneliness and vulnerability. Roster's dynamic energy is great for the role. When he

makes the characters dream, he takes the audience right along with them.

Liam Callister plays Jim, the younger brother - a boyish, hot-blooded young man full of drive, ready for mischief, breaking hearts left and right, but always forgiven because of an irresistible smile. Callister is a promising actor who is like a ray of sunshine on the stage. Naive, charming and good hearted, Callister does not steal the show because of the solid cast around him, but he could have.

I was surprised by the performances of Henry Perkins and Randy Anger. The father, played by Anger, is the philosopher of the family. He has seen droughts before and he has seen them end. The old man has relinquished part of his authority to the eldest son, but he is still there to make important decisions, and he is the first one to take chances. His decisions are pivotal to the evolution and relief of his family, stuck in their old ways. He wants to believe - believe in his daughter's beauty, in the rainmaker, in change. The older brother is the one who resists the longest. Very serious and responsible, he is at risk of, in the words of his father, "being so preoccupied about being right that he forgets what is good." Perkins is a perfect embodiment of the oldest brother, with a solid and stern presence - a kill-joy who continually comes up with reasonable, unpleasant truths whenever on stage.

Ultimately, this is a very optimistic and uplifting story.

"There are people in our lives who at some time need encouragement, who want a better life or a better day," says Silva. "What we learn in this play is that happiness has to come from within, but it is already there. Sometimes what has to be done to get unstuck is just as simple as taking a little chance on something or somebody, and letting it unfold. The result might not be what you had hoped for, or might take a very different route, but the drought has ended."

"The Rainmaker" will run through Oct. 5 at Town Hall Theatre. For tickets and more information, visit TownHallTheatre.com.

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