

‘Closer To The Moon’

When truth is stranger than fiction

By Sophie Braccini



Image provided

Filmed in English by Romania’s most popular director, Nae Caranfil, “Closer to the Moon” – which features English and American actors and opens at the Orinda Theatre Aug. 14 – is based on a dramatic and surrealistic bank robbery that happened in the country in 1959. The story is puzzling at first then slowly begins to make sense, if any sense can be made of the absurdity of a totalitarian regime. The protagonists portrayed in this film could be characters in a book by Romania’s well-known

author Eugene Ionesco and his theater of the absurd.

In Communist Romania, Max Rosenthal, former head of the investigative branch of the state police, and four other Jewish former partisans, rob an enormous amount of money from the National Bank, in the middle of Bucharest, in broad daylight, while pretending that they are shooting a movie. The five are caught, tried and sentenced to death. But an investigator who is wondering about their motives – why steal money that is not

exchangeable in a country where you can’t buy much – convinces the government to produce a reenactment film of the robbery for propaganda purposes, and tries to extract from the five the real motives for the theft.

The film’s overtone is quite dramatic. The heroes of the movie, when they decide to rob the bank and willingly put their lives on the line, feel desperate and trapped with no hope of escape, and they risk everything on this sophomoric prank to highlight weaknesses within the regime.

The actors, especially British actor Mark Strong (“The Imitation Game,” “Sherlock Holmes”) and his seductive presence, as well as American actress and Academy Award nominee Vera Farmiga (“Up in the Air,” “The Departed”) give an excellent and convincing performance. But Romanian critics cited historical errors in the movie, from Rosenthal’s rank, to the role of the five during the fight against Nazis, to how they conducted the trial, or the uniforms and armaments used at the time. And there are also exaggerated portrayals of the antagonistic characters. Securitate personnel, communists and others in the system are either overly drunk, obsessed insomniacs, overly soulless or hysterical. The lightness of this dark comedy is also somewhat detrimental to the dramatic impact of the movie.

Nonetheless, the film portrays an extraordinary act of rebelliousness, a slap in the face of a totalitarian system and an act of sacrifice. It was done to give hope and confidence to the people that the system was not invincible. And for that, four of the five paid with their lives.

“Closer to the Moon” will run for one week starting Aug. 14 at the Orinda Theatre as part of the International Film Showcase. For information, visit lamorindatheatre.org.

Specialties of the House

The Hunt for Happy Hour

By A.K. Carroll



Lily Pad cocktail is paired with a fried shrimp spring roll. A draft of Racer 5 sits alongside the braised rib and sweet potato fries. Photos A.K. Carroll

Welcome to the Hunt for Happy Hour, a new series in which we seek to bring you the freshest and finest when it comes to discounted beverages and premium small bites in the Lamorinda area. This week we kick things off with Lafayette Metro, a French bistro with an Asian flair that is evident even in their happy hour menu, where bartender and chef alike are given some room to play.

There’s something for every palate and every price range when it comes to the Happy Drinks and Happy Snacks on Metro’s afternoon menu. Running from 3 to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, Happy Hour starts in the sleek inner bar, carries into an airy sunroom and extends throughout the restaurant, umbrella-decked patio included.

Whether you’re getting an early start to ladies’ night, catching up over a cold one or toasting the end of the work day, you’ll find drinks and nibbles to suit the occasion. Bar manager Peter Doherty partners

with chef Albert Rivera to bring you happy hour selections that are a combination of familiar and fresh, featuring seasonal specialties and customer classics.

In addition to \$5 house wines, \$5 wells and \$3 drafts and domestic bottles, the beverage menu also features a “Happy Drink,” the bartender’s choice of a specialty cocktail. Rotating almost daily, the Happy Drink showcases special rifts on customer favorites, from a punchy blueberry Cosmo to a good old Rusty Nail to a fun and flirty Lily Pad, the latest house original to grace Metro’s cocktail menu. Made with lemon juice, Cointreau, Venus Spirits gin and a housemade syrup of muddled strawberries, basil, lemon and sugar, this pretty pink drink is perfect for late summer sipping.

Perfectly paired is the Happy Snacks menu, a modest selection of small bites to satisfy your snacky side. Mainstay favorites are \$1.95 West Coast oysters, \$3 steak or chicken street tacos and the \$3 tri-

tip slider, served on a traditionally chewy Acme baguette, oozing with cheese and slathered in spicy garlic aioli. Other items rotate based on the season and inspiration of Chef Rivera. One day you might find a crispy shrimp spring roll stuffed with Vietnamese rice noodles, cucumbers, carrots and spicy lime sauce, the next a tender and tangy beef rib, braised for four hours, dressed in a hoisin-sake-soy sauce with hints of ginger and Santa Rosa plums and served on a pile of savory sweet potato fries.

A French-style bistro with a bit of Asian flair, here’s to Metro, a great place to get happy!

Metro Happy Hour
When: 3-6 pm, Monday-Friday
Where: Lafayette Metro, 3524 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Drinks: \$3 drafts and domestics, \$5 wines and wells, \$5 Happy Drink
Food: \$3-\$5 Happy Snacks
Recommended: Lemon drop and crispy spring roll

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