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'Angels In America, Part Two'By *Sophie Braccini*

The Messenger Has Arrived; Ginny Wehrmeister as the Angel Of America. Photos Stu Selland

Throughout the course of the play every character has their assumptions challenged, their alliances broken and recreated in new ways. Humanity survives in the end. "Angels In America" is, after all, an optimistic play.

There are lighter moments as well with irony that will make the audience smile. But the richest pleasure lies with the level of the actors' performances, and how they can take the audience with them into their deepest emotions, without cheapening or overacting the great text.

Jeffrey Draper as Prior Walter is poignant and deeply moving. His fight with the angel is epic, his quest reaching a mythological proportion. Jerry Motta playing Roy Cohn does not become more likeable as he approaches death, but his struggle is grandiose and Motta is at his best. Dennis Markam, Alexandra Bogorad Coleman and Kerri Shawn show their value and give fully of themselves to the difficulties of the play. Ginny Wehrmeister, who plays the angel, carries the incredibly poetic language of Kushner to levels of lyricism. Alan Coyne as Joseph Pitt is vulnerable and weak, touching and struggling, trying to find his place in the maelstrom that rages inside and

Following last year's stellar production of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches," which landed Town Hall Theatre Company seven Shellie Awards, including Outstanding Production of the Year, THT once again pushes the envelope with part two, "Angels In America: Perestroika," Tony Kushner's 1990 play which opens Feb. 27. This bolder and fully mastered production definitely places the Lafayette theatrical group at the top of the Central Contra Costa/Diablo Valley region companies.

This season all the actors are back performing in the roles they embodied in the 2015 "Millennium Approaches" production. They pick up right where they left off, but seemingly with a deeper understanding of their characters that has developed since "Millennium."

"This is bigger than anything we've ever pulled off - the language, the story, the complexity," says director Joel Roster.

"Angels in America: Perestroika" is deep, cruel, uncompromising. It includes a criticism of the Reagan years, where, in Kushner's eyes, happiness was reachable only if you were in the norm and healthy. But it is also a fierce dissection of human behaviors when confronted with the worst adversity. Kushner desperately seeks a solution. Should humanity stand still, as the angel proposes, waiting for the return of God, or forge ahead however painful it might be. The play that deals with the AIDS crisis addresses universal questions.

outside him.

Roster directs his actors and the incessant ballet of the ever-changing decor with precision. Over the course of the evening, furniture comes and goes; lights spot one side of the scene or the other. It is also a technical masterpiece.

Those who saw part one last year won't want to miss the denouement this year. Although it is not necessary for the audience to have seen part one to understand "Angels in America: Perestroika," Town Hall Theatre is offering staged readings of "Millennium Approaches" at 2 p.m. on the Saturday afternoons preceding that day's performance.

"Angels in America: Perestroika" will run from Feb. 27 to March 19 at 3535 School Street in Lafayette, with previews on Feb. 25 and 26. For information, visit www.townhalltheatre.com.



Another 'American Gothic'; Joe Pitt (Alan Coyne) and Harper Amaty Pitt (Alexandra Bogorad Coleman)



Agreeing to Disagree; Louis Ironson (Dennis Markam) and Belize (LaMont Ridgell) from Town Hall Theatre's production of "Angels In America: Perestroika".



Preparing For What Comes; Hannah Pitt (Kerri Shawn), Prior Walter (Jeffrey Draper), and Roy Cohn (Jerry Motta)

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