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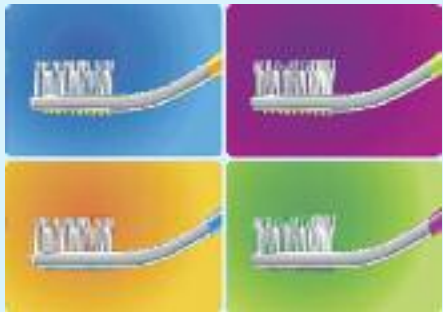
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Orinda Becomes Comedy Central on March 4

7th Annual Night of Comedy at Orinda Theatre

By Diane Claytor



Night of Comedy's headliner, Brad Williams

Photo provided

Everyone's heard that old saying: laughter is the best medicine. If that is, indeed, true, the Lamorinda community has the opportunity to greatly improve their health next month. That can be done by attending "A Night of Comedy," the Orinda Chamber of Commerce's very popular, and very funny, annual fundraiser. For the past six years, this event has had audiences practically rolling in the aisles. This year's March 4 evening at the Orinda Theatre promises more of the same.

Ben Feldman, named one of 2013's Best Comics to Watch by the San Francisco Weekly, will open the show, delighting the audience with his acerbic, playful wit. He'll then turn the stage over to the evening's headliner, Brad Williams, considered one of the funniest, most in demand comedians working today.

Williams is a little person (or, as he describes himself, "a dwarf, midget ... I say them all interchangeably"). But the only thing small about him is his 4 foot 4 stature. He has more energy and personality than people twice his size. In fact, the late, great Robin Williams once called him "Prozac with a Head."

"My comedy doesn't revolve around my size," Williams said. "I'm not going to talk about how I can take a bath in a thimble, but of course, my stories are told from my vantage point. I don't know how to tell a joke from the perspective of a 5-foot 10-inch blue-eyed blonde man."

Williams, a Southern California native, has been doing standup for 13 years, a career that started as a fluke

when he was a sophomore at USC. He had gone to a local comedy club when the performing comedian started making jokes about midgets. "The audience around me wasn't laughing," Williams said, which caused the comedian to take notice. "He brought me up on stage and started asking questions," Williams continued. "My answers got laughs and as soon as that happened, the adrenaline just soared through me. I remember it so vividly. That was the moment."

From there, Williams began attending open mic nights at comedy clubs throughout Southern California; he'd hustle, often driving for hours to get to a club where 'I'd have 15 minutes to make people laugh. It's a grinding, slow build," he reported. But he made it.

Williams has appeared on numerous TV shows, including Dave Attell's Comedy Underground, The Tonight Show and Jimmy Kimmel Live. He has two comedy albums, which he promotes by promising fans that "if you buy a comedy album from a midget you automatically get into heaven." He's a regular on a Los Angeles radio talk show and, along with his friend Adam Ray, produces "About Last Night," a weekly audio podcast. He just finished recording his second Showtime special, which will be out within the next several months. This follows on the heels of the Showtime special he did last year, which was the cable channel's highest rated comedy special of 2015.

A review of Williams' first CD, "Coming Up Short," said Williams' "approach to comedy is a smart one. Williams is a passionate comedian with some truly funny observations... he makes the world a better place by making us laugh."

On Friday, March 4, you'll have the opportunity to laugh hysterically, smile continually and witness Williams in action. You will also be able to enjoy adult beverages from the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association and the new Cine Cuvee.

Charlie Chaplin once said, "A day without laughter is a day wasted." Don't waste another day.

Tickets for this riotous evening, which begins at 7:30 p.m., are \$30. Front row, VIP seating, along with complimentary access to a private bar where champagne will flow all night, is available for \$100 per person. Tickets may be purchased by going to the Orinda Chamber of Commerce website, www.orindachamber.org.

'Angels In America, Part Two'

Town Hall Theatre Company confirms top league status

By Sophie Braccini



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

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 envelop 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. Throughout the course of the play every character has their assumptions challenged, their alliances broken and recreated in new ways. Hu-

manity 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 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.

... continued on next page



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