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Audiences Will Want a Repeat of Witty 'Play it Again, Sam'

By Sophie Braccini



The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship:
(From left) Humphrey Bogart (Jerry Motta),
the Fantasy Woman (Ginny Wehrmeister),
Linda Christie (Heather Kellogg) and Allen
Felix (Alan Coyne) in Town Hall Theatre's
"Play It Again, Sam" by Woody Allen,
directed by Soren Oliver Photo provided

The story might have been written in the 60s, but it is still relevant today. There are no cell phones or internet surfing interjected in the action, but the humor created by the difficult pursuit for love by someone who is insecure and gauche never fails to create gentle laughter.

The charm and effectiveness of the play comes from the way the different voices that play in Felix's mind are materialized on stage. With a different light and different costumes they enter and exit like colorful ghosts, sometimes in parallel with "real" characters. The way the play is directed makes it very clear and amusing.

First is Humphrey Bogart himself - perfectly impersonated by Jerry Motta, the real stud of a man that gives Felix advice on how to play it tough with the women and "be a man." Wrapped up in his famous fitted trench coat and wearing the classic fedora hat, Bogart tries to teach Felix the confidence he's always lacked with the ladies. The results vary, to the great delight of the audience.

Ginny Wehrmeister, also a regular performer at Town Hall, must be having a blast playing all the different fantasy women Felix dreams about. She gives to the depressed intellectual, the lascivious dancer, or the eccentric hippie her charming energy and nuanced impersonation.

Heather Kellogg and Edwin Peabody are very credible as Felix's supportive friends, while Megan Stetson, playing his wife, is trouble, right on the mark.

The references and lines from "Casablanca" and "Maltese Falcon" dot the play and all the classic Bogart movies lovers will rejoice.

Director Soren Oliver (previously directed "Art," "Twelfth Night" and "Sly Fox" at Town Hall) said

Humphrey Bogart coaching Woody Allen on how to impress dames is the comic scenario on which is built Town Hall Theater last play of the season, "Play It Again Sam." A very funny screenplay by Allen himself, it is close to the namesake 1972 movie that was in fact based on the 1969 Broadway show. Served by a talented cast, this new production beginning June 4 will delight Woody Allen as well as Humphrey Bogart lovers, or just anyone ready for a fun evening.

Town Hall Theater 71st season has been incredibly diverse again this year, featuring a wide range of plays and talents. Before the very amusing closing production, Town Hall had presented the multiple award winning play "Angels in America" about the AIDS epidemics, with Alan Coyne in one of the title roles as a young Mormon lawyer. It is this same actor that plays here Allen Felix (played by Woody Allen originally), a recently divorced neurotic writer riddled with guilt and lust, trying to re-enter the dating world and forge a new meaningful relationship.

that he had great pleasure directing this fast pace comedy.

"A lot in comedy is about timing," he said. "Making people laugh is not easy."

"Play It Again, Sam" runs June 4 through June 25 at Town Hall Theatre, located at 3535 School Street in Lafayette. Tickets are available on the website at townhalltheatre.com, or by calling the Box Office at (925) 283-1557.

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