

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 Søren Oliver. Photo provided

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.

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 cre-

ated 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 Søren Oliver (previously directed “Art,” “Twelfth Night” and “Sly Fox” at Town Hall) said 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.

JM Students Shine in Annual Math Olympiad

By Sophie Braccini

There is no need to be a math genius to participate in Karlene Steelman’s math competition class at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. This class provides a playful and different approach to solving math problems. And when it came to compete with 150,000 other students from all over the planet, the Moraga students did very well, with four of them ending in the top 10 percent and one in the top 2 percent of the annual Math Olympiad.

Enriched with this first years’ experience, the students who are not off to high school math next year say they will take the elective class again.

Steelman, who has been teaching math and science at the Moraga middle school for 10 years, was looking for a math enrichment class; something she would have loved to have as a kid, she says. She views the class as an opportunity for every student, an alternative where all abilities can flourish and learn from each other.

“This is an outlet for fun and interesting ideas,” she says. “I do have some students struggling in math that I have seen blossom in this class.”

The class works collaboratively on questions and thinks

of different ways of answering them. Steelman says that she learns every day because the students think in different ways.

She gives the example of a problem where one person goes to a shoe store where the third pair is free when someone buys two pair. In the problem, the person invites a friend along because he needs only two pair. The question is, how should they share the savings? Steelman says that the most advanced math students will immediately go into equations, while others are going to wonder about the interaction between the two friends, who paid for the gas, and who provided the savings opportunity. For that question, Steelman says there could be tens of different right answers.

Noel Sel a seventh-grade student says that she chose this class because she likes solving puzzles and is interested in math. With Annika Johnson, an eighth grader she met in the class, they are among the few girls belonging to that group. They both say they have fun while learning to use different concepts in a different way to solve problems. “It was a cool experience to compete and try to get the best scores,” adds Sel.

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