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## Although some standouts, 'Women on the Verge' misses the mark



Photo Jay Yamada

Marah Sotelo as Candela in the musical "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown"

By Sophie Braccini

Pedro Almadovar's movie "Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown" was a cult movie of the '80s, fun, irreverent, provocative, and sexy; it ignited a whole generation of Europeans and Americans alike. Now the question is: Does the play presented at Town Hall Theatre live up to its title? Unfortunately not.

If you saw the movie, the musical adaptation presented by Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette will likely disappoint. Only one or two for the main characters have the passion and extravagance necessary to carry the play, while the rest is flat. For those who have never heard of the movie, the entertainment is fine, with some great music, clever staging and a few daring moments that will let them imagine what this could have been if faithfully captured.

The action takes place in Madrid in 1987. Ivan has just left Pepa, the woman he lived and worked with for many years. She is increasingly desperate, looking for him all over town, while Ivan's wife, Lucia is also looking for him to sew him to get back the lost years. In the meantime, Pepa's friend Candela finds herself entangled in

a passionate romance with a very dangerous person, and she tries to reach her friend with mounting desperation. It is a story of passion, with multiple funny twists. Everyone is hot-tempered and borders hysteria at times. In the original movie that was nominated for the 1988 Oscars, the talent of director Almadovar and his Spanish actors made it a deliciously deranged comedy.

The adaptation as a musical was created in 2010 on Broadway, and according to Wikipedia had mixed reviews and closed in January 2011 after 30 previews and 69 performances.

Is that play too ambitious for the local theater? Town Hall Theatre has not hesitated in the past to present very powerful production such as Margaret Edson's "Wit" or Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," and did it with mastery. Missing the mark here unfortunately comes from some being miscast. Not everybody is capable of channeling the latent extravagance necessary for this play to work. The only actress who is believable as "on the verge of a nervous breakdown" is Marah

Sotelo as Pepa's friend Candela. The best scene of the play is when she tries desperately to reach her friend on the phone; all is there, the energy, the presence, the over the top passion, and the humor. One would wish that other actors would have followed that lead and played at that level rather than the diligent and proper acting delivered.

The main male character, the womanizer Ivan, is played by Paul Plain, topped with the most strange orange mane. Is that an allusion to the current White House's tenant? It is hard to comprehend how all the women in the play fall over themselves for him. Sheila Viramonte as Lucia and Debbie Lynn Carriger, as Lucia's lawyer, have some good moments, though it is hard to really believe in their characters.

Martin Flynn's scenic design is clever and makes the best use of the relatively limited space on stage, with special mention for the rendition of a full-throttle chase in the streets of Madrid. The music by David Yasbek is very rhythmic and energizing, carried on stage by a talented group of musicians.

"Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" will run through June 22. Tickets and more information can be found at [www.townhalltheatre.com](http://www.townhalltheatre.com).

## Saklan students perform 'West Side Story'



Photo Kim Anderson, Anderson DiFranco Photography

Submitted by Lori Anders

The Saklan School presented its 11th Annual Middle School Musical at Town Hall Theater in Lafayette May 17 and 18 with the Broadway Musical "West Side Story," School Edition with Grace Chaffey, the Music and Performing Arts teacher at Saklan directing the show.

"West Side Story" is based on Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and takes place in New York City in the 1950s. The themes of this show tied in with the eighth grade Humanities curriculum

and involve immigration and race relations, as well as generational gap issues; themes that are incredibly relevant today.

The middle school production is unique at Saklan in that the entire middle school collaborates to put together the show. From roles on the stage to stagecraft, costume design, sound, and stagehands – all students work together to put on this musical production. Throughout this process, students learn to identify on a personal level their characters, collaborate, and deepen their creativity and courage on stage.

## Doggone Fun Fest planned for June 23

Submitted by Carolyn Mills

The Orinda Park and Rec Foundation is once again holding its Doggone Fun Fest from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, June 23 in the Community Park – a great event for kids and pooches alike. This free event will feature agility and obedience demonstrations, the sheriff's canine unit demonstration, many contests, the doggie parade (costume optional) and a raffle. Come join the fun!



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