

'The Good Boss,' a wry comedy at the Orinda Theatre



Image provided

By Sophie Braccini

"The Good Boss (El buen patrón)," a Spanish movie that represented its country at the 94th Academy Awards and has received 30 international awards, makes its Contra Costa debut at the Orinda Theatre on Sept. 23. Ferociously entertaining and fast paced, it portrays Julio Blanco a paternalist business owner played by Javier Bardem (Academy Award winner for Best Supporting Actor for his performance the Coen Brothers' film "No Country for Old Men"). Viewers will love to hate Blanco, the manipulating and charming demi-god who will stop at nothing to get his way.

Blanco is as odious as he is charming. The charismatic leader inherited from his father a professional scale manufacturing company and it is clear that he has learned to handle people from an early age. The movie takes the spectator on a 10-day voyage as the boss will do anything to remove all obstacles on the road to getting the last missing award for his company's brilliant track record. Blanco is struggling with protesting workers, a clueless wife, and a production director on the verge of

a nervous breakdown. He is confronted with a situation spiraling out of control and grappling to find good and very bad solutions to have his way no matter what. He is obviously someone with whom no one says no to and who cannot deal with frustration.

The movie opens as the debonair and all-powerful boss explains how he runs his business like a watchful father taking care of his children. A father who has his favorites, and who points out the ugly ducklings. He is the benevolent boss that employees in distress can call upon when they have family issues; and he is the one who does not hesitate to manipulate and threaten if someone's private life risks to upset the balance of the company. As he explains to a sacked longtime worker, "sometimes you have to trick the scale to get the exact weight." He is also the obnoxious womanizer who does not hesitate to court the new very young intern.

This comedic satire shows that businesses are no democracy. The boss rules, for the good of all and for his own, not hesitating to amputate what he sees as a diseased part, in the name of the survival of the whole body. Blanco perceives

himself as above the law, acts accordingly and probably has a very clear conscience.

Bardem brings to this role a natural geniality, and wins the spectators over, until the menace seeps through and his portrayal of total selfishness and insensitivity flourishes. His powerful stature dominates the cast as his position in the company dominates others, but the supporting cast reveals other excellent actors. Almudena Amor as Liliana, the young intern Blanco covets but who outsmarts him, or Manolo Solo as Miralles, the desperate and out of control production manager, create lively and interesting characters, as well as many others.

The movie was directed and written by Fernando León de Aranoa, a prolific director who has won multiple awards. In an interview with the AU Review he said that he wanted to explore labor relations in a way that would balance drama and humor. The result is totally up to par.

"The Good Boss" will open at the Orinda Theatre for at least one week starting on Sept. 23. Tickets and further information at www.internationalshowcase.org

Student loans that make sense

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

Student loans are often viewed negatively, in part because they are associated with the rising cost of higher education. Yet many students could not go to college without the help of a loan.

When college students borrow judiciously, they can build a sound credit history, add value to their lives now and prepare for their future. Some families who can pay full college costs choose to have their student take out loans to fund college so the student can be a stakeholder in their own education. Other families borrow to relieve the strain of tuition payments, even if they do not qualify for need-based aid. The key is for students to use loans wisely, so they end up with a manageable debt, while building and maintaining a good credit history.

One way for students to conservatively manage their debt is to borrow no more than the maximum allowed through the Direct Student Loan Program administered by the US Department of Education. Di-

rect Subsidized Loans are available to undergraduate students with demonstrated financial need. Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available with no requirement to demonstrate need. Subsidized means that the federal government pays the interest while the student is enrolled at least half time in school and for the first six months after they graduate. Unsubsidized means that the student pays the interest while they are in school and after graduation until the loan is paid off.

If a student qualifies for an interest-subsidized loan, the aggregate total allowed is \$19,000 over four years in college. A student who does not qualify for subsidized loans may borrow up to \$27,000 in unsubsidized loans, also over four years. Colleges that receive federal money for these kinds of student loans administer the loans through their financial aid offices. When a student has demonstrated financial need, the college's financial aid office can award a combination of interest-subsidized and unsubsidized loans, but the aggregate

amount of debt cannot exceed \$27,000.

The interest rate for Direct Student Loans is fixed for the 2022-23 academic year at 4.99%. The Department of Education provides very clear and annually updated guidelines to the affordability of college and reasonable levels of college debt (see:

<https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/loans/subsidized-unsubsidized>). A handy tool to estimate the annual salary one needs to pay back a specific amount of loan can be found on FinAid's website (see: <https://finaid.org/calculators/loanpayments/>). For example, if a student accrued a debt of \$27,000, he or she would have to earn about \$35,000 annually to make a monthly payment of about \$290 over a 10-year time span required to pay off the debt.

Financial aid offices might also award Direct Parent PLUS Loans. These, too, are federal loans, only parents are the borrowers. Parents may borrow up to the estimated total cost of attendance for college, including tuition, fees, room and

board and incidentals such as books, less any financial aid the student received. Eligibility for Direct Parent PLUS Loans is based on a credit check. Interest is charged during the entire period of the loan. The interest rate for these loans is 7.54%. There is also an origination fee of 4.228%, which is deducted from the principle. Three types of repayment plans are available, depending on the parent's income and creditworthiness as well the total amount borrowed (see: <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/loans/plus/parent>). Depending on the plan, parents may pay off their debt within 10 to 30 years.

Parents who are considering Parent PLUS Loans should be careful to consider how much they want to borrow for each year that their student is college. When the annual cost of attendance at some highly selective private institutions is approaching \$90,000, excessive student loan debts may put parents' retirement at risk. So, parents, like students, should also borrow judiciously to maintain good credit and prepare for their future.



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Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the US. Elizabeth attends conferences, visits campuses and makes personal contacts with admissions networks to stay current on the evolving nature of college admissions. She and her professional team offer resume development, test preparation, academic tutoring, value analysis, merit and need-based scholarship search and more.

New children's book addresses complex issues of kindness and inclusivity

Nobody likes a bully. Not even in the animal kingdom!

Lamorinda author and Lamorinda Weekly columnist, Cynthia Brian, debuts her first book in the children's picture book series, "Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures," with her charming true-life cadre of characters and endearing illustrations by Jensen Russell in "No Barnyard Bullies," a colorful book about learning to be kind and inclusive.

"No Barnyard Bullies" follows a pampered piglet who lives in an apartment as she is re-homed to a barnyard filled with a variety of happy critters. Thinking that she is the Queen, she bullies the other animals until she is stopped by

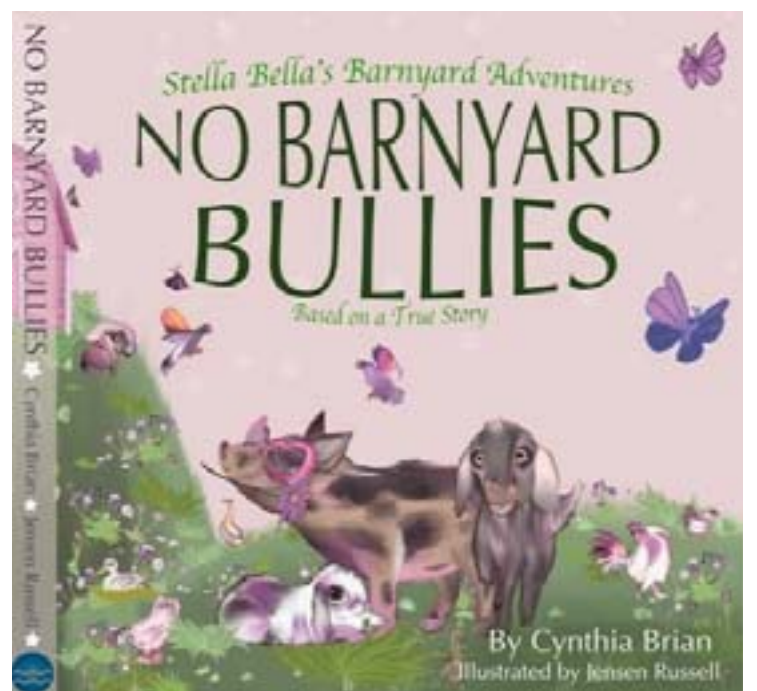
a tiny bunny who defends a three-legged goat from her attacks. Everyone is equal in Stella Bella's barnyard where bullies are not tolerated, and inclusivity is the paramount number one rule. Colorful, animated illustrations of the characters bring the prose and poetry dialog to life with timely and timeless tales that are relatable to humans.

The goal of "Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures" is to instill in children wonder and awe of Mother Nature and her creatures as they participate in the escapades of the wild kingdom. Children are encouraged to love themselves exactly the way they are while living in peace and harmony with a

barnyard of many colors and beliefs. Family is about whom you love and who loves you. In the series, the true tales will emerge from a variety of different animals, all with a prescription for living as better humans.

Brian will be selling and signing first editions of the book at the Be the Star You Are! booth at the Pear and Wine Festival on Saturday, Sept. 24 at Moraga Commons Park in Moraga.

Books are also available at these online stores: www.BetheStarYouAre.org and www.CynthiaBrian.com - J. Wake



Moraga Community Service Day scheduled for Oct. 1-2



Submitted by Mike McCluer

The town of Moraga has a rich history of community service,

residents rolling up their sleeves to help people in need and to make Moraga and its extended community a better place. Of these ideals was born the Moraga Community Service Day project, with the singular goal of bringing the townsfolk together to assist those in need, and help beautify our schools and town. This is your opportunity to help Moraga; to care, give and connect.

This project is sponsored and led by several Moraga Community groups, including Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Garden Club, Moraga Chamber of Com-

merce, Moraga School District, Campolindo High School, and Saint Mary's College.

This weekend event encourages all Moraga families to sign up and volunteer 1-3 hours on Saturday or Sunday and truly help people in need as well as the community of Moraga. Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek have held similar events with great success for their communities.

A few key projects include: donating food for homeless, low-income families, isolated seniors and foster children; painting planting pots

with messages of kindness and personal expression of caring delivered and donated to various local seniors organizations; helping the Moraga School District with beautification at multiple campuses through gardening and cleaning; planting new shade trees in the front and side of the Commons Park Bandshell for greater sun safety and enjoyment; participating in sustainable gardening projects at Campolindo High School and Saint Mary's College; donating blood to help those needing blood infusions to save lives; helping lo-

cal seniors with projects, errands and socialization; and fire abatement and trail clearing locally to safeguard our local residents.

These selected projects and more represent a great opportunity for Moraga residents and families to show their caring by volunteering time, resources, and working with fellow civic minded residents to enhance our great inclusive community.

To view all the projects and sign up for your favorite one or to donate, visit <http://moragaserviceday.org/>