

ENTERTAINMENT

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“Steel Magnolias” brings laughs and tears to receptive Playhouse audience

Susan S. Yeske

In the tradition of summer stock dating back to the time when there was no air conditioning on Broadway, the Bucks County Playhouse has assembled a cast of famous faces to launch its summer season.

Only this time theatergoers get to watch in an air-conditioned theater and the faces onstage are better known for their roles on television than Broadway.

Laughter through tears is the theme of “Steel Magnolias,” written by playwright Robert Harling to memorialize his beloved sister who died at 32 of complications from diabetes.

The play, which has an all-female cast and focuses on the bonding experience of six strong women from northern Louisiana, is directed by a seventh powerhouse woman: four-time Oscar nominee and Golden Globe winner Marsha Mason.

It opens on the wedding day of Shelby Eaton, played by Clea Alsip, a familiar face at the Playhouse from her performance in “Yanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike.” She plays Shelby as upbeat and cheerful, demonstrating the strength that gets her and the other characters through tough times.

The entire play has one set: the town’s best beauty parlor, owned by Truvy Jones, who is played with perfect comedic timing by Elaine Hendrix of FX’s “Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll.”

Hendrix charmingly hits the mark with every line, whether funny or sad, and is surprisingly adept as she styles the hair of the women rotating in and out of her



Susan Sullivan, Lucy DeVito, Jessica Walter, Clea Alsip, Elaine Hendrix, and Patricia Richardson.

beauty parlor chair.

Assisting her is her newest employee, Anelle Dupuy-Desoto, played by Lucy DeVito, daughter of actors Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman. The role requires DeVito to transition from a shy newcomer to a party girl to a born-again Christian, and finally to a stable mom-to-be, all of which she handles ably. She achieved all this and demonstrated that her parents aren’t the only ones in the family with comedic timing.

Patricia Richardson, best known for her role on “Home Improvement,” portrays Shelby’s sensible mother M’Lynn, the steeliest magnolia of all, who has been dealing with her daughter’s illness since birth. She sheds the most tears but also manages to find laughter in this pivotal role where she interacts mostly with Alsip, deftly defining the mother-daughter relationship.

Happily filling the supporting roles of friends Claree Belcher and Ouiser Boudreaux are well-known actresses Susan Sullivan and Jessica Walter. Sullivan, who most

recently portrayed Richard Castle’s mother on the hit TV series “Castle,” is charming and funny as Claree while showing plenty of style. Walter, of “Arrested Development,” is droll and on point as the cantankerous Ouiser.

The ensemble performed to an enthusiastic sold-out audience on opening night that included Danny DeVito. As each of the well-known actresses took the stage they were greeted with a round of applause.

There may have been a dropped line here or there, but it didn’t detract from the enjoyment of the audience, which gave a standing ovation at the end.

If you think you already know the show from seeing the popular movie version, think again. The stage presentation, featuring a full lineup of talented actresses, is an experience of its own, and well worth making the trip to New Hope.

The show continues through June 18. For show times and tickets see the Playhouse website beptheater.org.

Original, musical revue next at Open Air Theatre

Musical revues have become a popular offering at the Open Air Theatre, and co-Artistic Directors Louis Palma and Jordan Brennan have created a new concert featuring songs from stage and movie musicals.

“From Stage to Screen” will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday, June 10, Saturday, June 11 and Sunday, June 12.

Billed as a Broadway-style concert, “From Stage to Screen” is comprised of popular tunes from both stage and movie musicals. Act one will feature songs that appeared on stage and then made it to the big screen, while act two will include songs that started on screen and traveled to the stage.

Notable songs from both acts include “The Impossible Dream” from “Man of La Mancha,” “Steam Heat” from “The Pajama Game,” “Put on a Happy Face” from “Bye, Bye Birdie,” “I Love Betsy” from “Honeymoon in Vegas,” “The Man That Got Away” from “A Star is Born,” and many more.

The cast includes performers who have entertained audiences over the past several Open Air seasons. Among the singers are Suzanne Slade, Lucy Fisher, David McCloghuan, Jr., Erin Rose Clark, Shelly Tapp and Chris



SUZANNE SLADE

Uchirn. The production also features a teen cast that includes Emily Cobb, Gary Lumpkin and Cody Ayer, among others.

Tickets to shows at the Open Air Theatre can be purchased at the box office one half hour prior to any performance. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for children ages 12 and under and \$12 for seniors ages 65 and older. Group discounts are available.

For information about the 2016 Summer Season of main stage shows and more, visit Downtown PAC online. The Washington Crossing Open Air Theatre is located inside Washington Crossing State Park at 455 Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, Titusville, N.J. The box office phone number is 267-885-9857.

“Time Stands Still” in Langhorne

Susan S. Yeske

Our often harsh and difficult world has many unpleasant issues that people choose not to confront until reality forces them.

But it also has light and laughter, and you will find all of this rippling through the David Margulies play, “Time Stands Still,” which is the current production of the Langhorne Players at Spring Garden Mill outside Newtown.

The Tony award-nominated play fulfills the Players’ goal to present thoughtful works; it slowly brings you face-to-face with the characters’ reality and sends you home with them lingering on the edge of your psyche.

This is an intimate play with only four characters, made even more intimate by the modest size of the Spring Garden Mill theater. A carefully constructed set places you in the living quarters of a couple where the entire play takes place. The actors are so close that you almost feel you can reach out and touch them.

Veteran community theater

actress Laura Scotti has the lead role of Sarah Goodwin, a photojournalist who was nearly killed by a roadside bomb while working in Iraq. Her boyfriend is James Dodd, played by Nigel Rogers, a familiar face with the Players and in local community theater.

The roles are intense, as James deals with his post-traumatic stress disorder from his own experiences in Iraq and his fears for Sarah, who is recovering from serious injuries. But Margulies also has skillfully woven much-needed humorous moments into the script, giving both the actors and the audience the chance to take an occasional breath, smile and relax.

Over the course of the show, the layers of the relationship between Sarah and James are slowly peeled away, leading to the play’s conclusion. As they weep, laugh and reveal their hidden feelings, both Scotti and Rogers succeed in making you care very much about their characters while yearning to know that in the end they will be all right.

The supporting cast of the couple’s friend Richard Ehrlich and his

girlfriend Mandy Bloom are played by community theater veteran Tom Dinardo and Sara Stepnowski, who is making her second appearance at Spring Garden Mill. Sweet, bubbly Mandy is a counterpoint to Sarah, who has no trouble looking life’s ugliness in the eye, then capturing it with her camera.

Dinardo is believable and real as the friend and boss of both Sarah and James, while Stepnowski brings to her role the right blend of youthful naivete and joy for life. Directing the play is Jean Brenner, whose impressive local theater credentials span six decades. Brenner said that the first time she read the script for the play, “It spoke to me,” and she fell in love with the passion of the character Sarah.

That passion comes through in all four performances and the show itself. This is not a happily-ever-after show, but neither is it a heart-breaker. It is well-performed, insightful and worth seeing.

The show continues June 9, 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18. See langhorneplayers.org or call 215-860-0818 for tickets and information.

Crowded Kitchen Players to open at IceHouse

Crowded Kitchen Players continues its original play series with Brian McDermlt’s comedy, “Look Out,” at 8 p.m. June 10, 11, 17, 18 and 2 p.m. June 12 and 19 at the Charles A. Brown IceHouse, 56 River St., Bethlehem.

Hurling through the minefields of unrequited love, fading passion, irrational fear, and all the other fiendish elements of daily living, four couples and their various attendants and tormentors try to summon the courage and the will to hold on for at least one more tomorrow.

In 1939 – 18 and 2 p.m. Thomas Rush, Drake Nester – a man and woman, mismatched by age, circumstance, and degree of passion perform the Dance of Denial in a sleazy motor lodge;

In 1959 – Pamela Wallace,

Suzanne Hoffman, Ara Barlieb – a long suffering couple aboard a Caribbean cruise ship drifting inexorably toward marital shoals.

In 1979 – Tom Harrison, Lauri Beth Rogers, Alex Racines – a businessman on a transcontinental train feels his corporation has exiled him to a post in a far-off Canadian gully;

In 2019 – Brian Wendt, Brian McDermlt, Steven Rosenblum – a claustrophobic man is strapped into a plane seat by his long-suffering co-dependent partner.

The cast is directed by Ara Barlieb; Nora Oswald is set painter, and the stage manager is David Fox.

Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$14 for seniors and \$10 for students at 610-395-7176, ckplayers@rcn.com, ckplayers.com or at the door.

Central Bucks Conservatory offers student recital

The Central Bucks Conservatory of Music will present a student recital at 6 p.m. Friday, June 10, at St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, 10 Chapel Road, New Hope. Admission is free.

The program will begin with piano arrangements of American music and compositions by Beethoven and Grieg played by students of concert pianist Roburt Gaidos.

The rest of the program will feature guest artist and New York based concert violinist Tzu-en Lee. She has won numerous competitions, including the Taiwan National Competition, and is a member of New York’s Alaria Chamber Ensemble.

She will perform the “Fifth Duo for two violins” by J.C. Bach with advanced student Erik Djokic, who studies with Alexandre Djokic at C.B.C.M. and Kinga Augustyn in Manhattan.

Lee will conclude the concert with a performance of the “Sticciene and Presto” from the “Sonata in G minor” of J.S. Bach for solo violin.

For information, call or text the school at 609-516-3617.

Chip Mergott: Music Minute From a distance

I was backstage recently with folksinger Christine Lavin at the New Hope Winery when she told this story about Philadelphia native Julie Gold’s “From a Distance.”

“I asked Julie to bring me 10 cassettes ... she did, and I sent it to 10 important people,” Christine said. “One was Nancy Griffith, who ended up recording it. One was Stephen Holden [of the New York Times.] When

Bette Midler’s producer was looking for a follow up to his “Wind Beneath My Wings,” he called Stephen and said ‘Have you heard anything?’ and Stephen said ‘From a Distance.’”

Julie Gold’s song has now been recorded around the world hundreds of times.

The Mergott Music Minute can be heard daily on WDVV FM 89.7.

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