

THEATER NOTES By Sidney B. Simon

## ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY

Sanibel Theater lovers are lucky to have three Ft. Myers Theaters that present , brave and truly noteworthy productions. I regret that some of the plays will have been here and gone before this gets into print. But, it does allow me to tell you some coming attractions very worthy of your attention.

One of my most deeply satisfying Plays was August Wilson's FENCES that lit up the stage at Florida Repertory Theater in January. I hope many of you saw it and would agree. We were lucky to sit in the first row. With a magnificent cast and superb direction, glorious production details, it will remain one of my all time favorites at Florida Rep. The lead, who played Troy Maxson was phenomenal and dazzling. But, the real star to me was Gayle Samuels who played Rose, Troy's wife. Her heroism touched me most deeply.

That takes me to Theatre Conspiracy at the Alliance where Bill Taylor gives us edgy plays as delightful gifts. I saw a recent show that commands attention. A play by Adam Szymkowicz called "Marian, or the True Tale of Robin Hood." It was ambitious and daring. It was filled with gender trading and wonderful laugh lines. The director, Rachel Endrizzi had her hands full. I remember her from years ago when she starred in "Almost Maine" and stole the show. This quote from Ms. Endrizzi tells why they extended the run. "It's a little like Monty Python meets Robin Hood with the women's movement and LGBT movement added in."

I hope some of you saw the production. It demanded a special kind of audience. But, now, Bill Taylor, artistic director, brings us one of the best of the season March 1-17, August Wilson's "Joe Turners Come and Gone." I suspect this will be a Must See for so many of us..

Finally, the trip way out 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to what is the area's most daring and consistently thrilling site, The Laboratory Theater of Florida, the place where Artistic Director Annette Trossbach works her magic. After an extended run with "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," she gives us a delightful and confronting play by Mitch Albom, famous for his marvelous play, "Tuesdays With Morrie."

The play is "And The Winner Is..." and I think this play will be a winner for The Lab audiences. It is genuinely funny, with some of the most brilliant one liners and hilarious physical humor that will keep you chuckling all the way out to the parking lot and the ride home.

It is the story of Tyler Johnes, an egotistic movie star, who finally gets nominated for an Oscar, then dies the night before the event. He's furious about what happened and eager to know who wins, he makes a bargain. A dubious bargain with a baffling little man played delightfully by long time veteran, Dave Yudowitz, named Seamus. He claims having great powers. The bargain is that Johnes can get to return to earth for the big Oscar night. Are you still there? Remember Seamus has powers he is bargaining with.

This is where you have to suspend your disbelief, but It's worth it, because of so many gags and events that happen that before the intermission. Here's where we meet the other marvelous people. Tyler's wife , Sheri, well acted by Danielle Channell. Then there's Kyle Morgan, played by Michael Andrew, the other guy nominated for the same Oscar. Buddy, Tyler's Agent and pretty obviously a hustler using Tyler. We also meet Serenity the luscious femme fatale, and a thorough distraction for everyone else on stage.

Now, I want to state that this is not a farce. I don't like farce, but, I accepted some of the farcical activities in the play, because "And the Winner Is" attacks some of the grip Hollywood has on entertainment, and behavior models, with some values that are hardly worth emulating. Seamus reminds us that we also have jobs to do before you get to take your afterlife into Heaven. He's rigid about our nightly prayer. **Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.**

I hope you will find the play as entertaining and meaningful as Mitch Albom wanted it to be. As one director once said: "Mitch uses humor as a window into the human heart." It's all here, wild and bouncy under director Trossbach's powerful direction. My hat's off for the production features as well. It's hard to believe, this is Community Theater. No equity actors, just good people who have day jobs and come rehearse for hours after work and on weekends to bring us joy and meaning.

Call the box office and order tickets fast. The play only runs until March 16<sup>th</sup>. 239-218-0481. Tell them you saw this review in the Sanibel Islander Paper.