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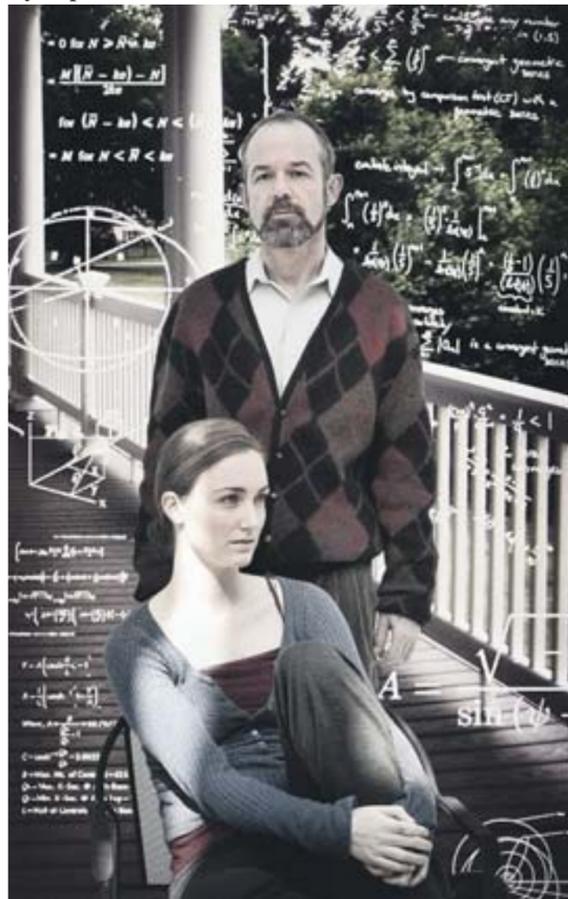
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Proof: Mirth, Mystery, Madness and Math

By Sophie Braccini



Clive Worsley as Robert and Siobhan Doherty as Catherine
Photo by Stu Selland for Town Hall Theater

To those of us who are not geniuses, the flirtatious dance between mental instability and brilliance is a far frontier. Still, even for the reasonable and down to earth amongst us, there is a fascination about the extreme regions an exceptional mind can reach. The

Town Hall Theater Company's (THT) last play of the season, *Proof*, is about that dance; the vulnerability of those who are engaged in it, its dangers and its appeal. It is a powerful play that bears some of the appeal of Ron Howard's movie "A Beautiful Mind," with a central

female character who will, we hope, survive her exploration of extreme mathematics.

Proof is about a young woman who took care of her mathematician-father for several years prior to his death, which came after a long bout with mental illness. Written by David Auburn in 2001, it received the Joseph Kesselring Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Desk Award, and the Tony Award for Best Play of 2001.

Many themes run through the play - Whether mental illness, as well as talent, can be inherited; various misconceptions about mathematicians being a young man's profession (with an emphasis on the word "man"); that there is something that predisposes mathematicians to mental instability; that all creative work is done in the early period of one's life.

It's not a small endeavor for any theater to take on this play. In Lafayette, it was proposed by Artistic Director Clive Worsley to Berkeley Rep Director MaryBeth Cavanaugh. She agreed on two conditions; she wanted to work with Lisa Anne Porter as a co-director and she wanted Worsley himself in the play.

"I was a bit afraid to say yes," says Worsley, "First I thought it would be hard to play someone older than me, but the real challenge was inside: the role requires a level of honesty and vulnerability that's a bit nerve wrecking." Cavanaugh, who knows Worsley well, thought he had the talent to pull off the role.

The casting is just right. Worsley as Robert, the older math

genius, moves with great realism between normalcy, overexcitement, and the poignant face of dementia. Siobhan Doherty, as his daughter Catherine, is beautiful, vulnerable, difficult, fragile and very touching. She wins the heart of the audience, which is kept on edge as her fate is decided. Alexandra Creighton is perfect in her depiction of the other daughter, Claire, the "normal" one. She represents all of us, with her two dimensional vision of life, her practical and pragmatic views, her good intentions and common sense. Harold Pierce is Hal, the old professor's student who is attracted to Catherine, but who has a hard time believing in her. He adds his young, positive energy to a situation that could get bogged down.

The duo directing the play achieves harmony. Cavanaugh is the visual mind of the pair. She choreographed the ensemble and worked with the sound designer to develop a fluid, musical and elegant way to present the play. Porter, an actor by training, concentrated on the text and the actors. The professional result is a testimony to their cooperation. "This is our first co-direction, but we've worked together as parts of other teams before," said Cavanaugh, "we knew we had similar esthetics." Porter adds, "It is hard to be in charge and have an eye on everything; here it was so much fun to just concentrate on the text work of the actors."

In the first act of the play the rhythm weakens a bit toward the middle. But it finishes with a bang, and the second act does not let up. *Proof* runs from June 5 to July 3. It

is rated PG-13 (for strong language) and is about two hours long. Showtimes: 8:00 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 2:00 p.m. June 13 and 20,

7 p.m. June 27. Contact the Town Hall Theatre Box Office at (925) 283-1557, or purchase online at www.TownHallTheatre.com.

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When War Hurts, at Home

By Lou Fancher



Michael Cadwell and Megan Brubaker Photo provided

Michael Cadwell served four times in Iraq and survived. The trouble is, he brought his terrifying Marine Corps and private security memories back with him. And what's worse, in an ironic, but typical Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) pattern, the nightmarish mental anguish increased the longer he was home.

Sitting comfortably reclined in the living room of his Lafayette duplex, Cadwell has a wide-open, blue-eyed gaze and the comfort of his girlfriend, Megan Brubaker. It's hard to imagine him dodging from room to room, pistol cocked, heart pounding forcefully in his chest, "clearing" every corner and closet. "The first year out I was fine," Cadwell says, "then gradually, I was beyond paranoid."

The fear became so pervasive, he couldn't enter a grocery store without succumbing to panic or anger. Brubaker, a Marriage and Family Therapy student at Cal State East Bay, knew it was only going to get worse.

Cadwell went to the Veteran's Administration (VA) for help. What the military offered was a guilt trip. "There were guys sitting in the same group with me who had

had a leg blown off or an arm missing," he remembers, "I'd been over there four times and didn't have a scratch on me." Disappointment in the VA counseling added to his symptoms. "Their job was training us for war, not dealing with it when you get back," Cadwell says.

Brubaker agrees, saying Cadwell had learned he was "supposed to be mad, so he could fight." What's worse, when he returned, he was "taught not to talk about it, because that's how you are strong, how you protect your family." Fortunately for Cadwell, Christina Madlener, the founder and Executive Director of Veterans Resource, came to speak at a class Brubaker was taking.

Veteran's Resource, a community-based non-profit providing counseling for veterans and their families, specializes in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). Although Cadwell had doubts, Brubaker insisted he give it a try. "I was trying it out mostly to shut her up," he admits. Today, just over a year later, the comment doesn't faze Brubaker in the least, especially because the therapy worked.

Two-hour sessions, focusing

on specific memories while sensory stimulation from a vibrating machine and flashing lights reconfigured the connections in his brain, rapidly reduced Cadwell's PTSD. "People that were calmer than me before, now, they get mad before me," he says, sounding surprised. Prior to his tours in Iraq, Cadwell describes himself as "happy—didn't have a care in the world." Then came the rage and paranoia of PTSD. And now? "Happy—but I think things through."

If it's all so easy, if EMDR is one of the most effective tools for combating war-related PTSD, then why isn't the VA offering it? "It's expensive to change," suggests Brubaker. She points out that implementing new therapies means retraining personnel, reconfiguring decades-old systems, and supplying individual treatment. Not to mention knocking aside what Cadwell believes is the most formidable barricade: the military's steely-jawed, don't talk profile.

Dr. Gellerman, Clinic Manager at the Mental Health Clinic at VA Sacramento Medical Center, explains why EMDR is not currently available in the Northern California area: "We don't have people trained in it." But he does offer hope for vets interested in receiving the therapy, saying the VA "can fee-basis the patient." If approved, this process operates like a referral, with the VA covering the outside provider's costs.

The luck Cadwell had in remaining physically unscathed while in Iraq didn't end upon his return. He's still receiving therapy once a week, but his memories are forever changed. His house is clear, his hope is returning, his healing has begun.

Veterans Resource is located in Walnut Creek. For more information, go to <http://veteransresource.org/> or call 925-271-7667; reach Christina Madlener at christina@veteransresource.org.

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