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Rheem Sells Out

By Sophie Braccini

Moraga's Vice-Mayor, Karen Mendonca, was out of luck on July 17th when she tried to get into the New Rheem Theatre to see *On the Waterfront*. The classic movie night was sold out, something that hasn't happened at the Rheem in quite a while.

A combination of factors may have contributed to the event's popularity. The theater's new management, the California Independent Film Festival Association (CAIFFA), draws folks from beyond Moraga's borders. And Larry Swindell's aficionados, who love to hear his knowledgeable presentations, come out whenever he's speaking. "We were not able to exercise the option of buying our tickets ahead of time--which would have been the thing to do," said Mendonca. "I peeked inside the theater where the classic film was being shown, and it was standing room only. Isn't that wonderful?"

Some of the patrons were regular classic movie goers, but others were not. "I have never been to a classic movie night," said Diane Wagner. "We live in Moraga, however, and are very supportive of the Rheem Theatre reopening - in fact, we bought a senior membership at the opening ceremony."

Tim Freeman had attended classic movie nights before. "I truly enjoyed seeing *On the Waterfront* at the Rheem, having seen it for the first time many years ago," he said, "The experience was made all the more enjoyable by Larry Swindell's introduction to the movie. Larry has this incredible recall of all things relating to movies (and baseball if you are interested). He can elaborate on the people that made the film, the lives of the people making up the characters, as well as the historical context and the importance of the film. Suddenly you are seeing this classic movie from a totally different perspective."

Swindell is a Moraga author who published many movie biographies in the 70's and 80's such as "Screwball: The Life of Carole Lombard," and "The Last Hero: A Biography of Gary Cooper." On July 17th he spoke for five minutes before the screening, mainly explaining the "method" acting that is a touchstone for the film's reputation.

"I chose not to deal with the plot development, other than to praise a powerful melodrama. Instead I cited the development of the Group Theatre in New York in the pre-World War II era, when members of the Group included Elia Kazan (director of *On the Waterfront*) and three actors in the film--Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb and Rod Steiger," explains Swindell, "after the Group disbanded, Kazan formed the Actors Studio, which again included Malden, Cobb and Steiger, in 1946."

Swindell explained to the audience how the Actors Studio became the most prestigious acting school in America, and among those it developed were Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint (both Oscar winners for *On the Waterfront*).

"This school employed the 'Stanislavsky Method' as its dogma," said Swindell. "Stanislavsky was head of a world-famous Russian acting company whose method invoked memory association, relating one's own experience to attain the correct emotion required for a scene. *On the Waterfront* is the premier example of method acting on film."

"An introduction by Larry Swindell is a very important ingredient for making the experience truly educational as well as enjoyable," added Freeman, "and I for one want to see more classic movies at the Rheem."

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