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THT Production Offers Heaping Helping of Holiday Hilarity

By Sophie Braccini



From left, Liam Callister, Dennis Markam, and Justin Dupuis. Photo Stu Selland

Michael Storm says it is the funniest play he's ever directed. "Every Christmas Story Ever Told (And Then Some!)" is indeed a fast-paced comedy and a wonderful choice by Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre to put everyone in a jovial mood for the holidays. It is supported by an excellent cast of three favorite THT actors who make full use of their comic genius.

"We start off with the opening of 'A Christmas Carol.' But then the character on stage delivering the first lines is joined by two of his fellow actors who are not interested anymore in doing that play and they convince him to diverge and try to create a piece of theater that's all encompassing, representing all Christmas stories existing from all different countries around the world," says Storm. Then starts a hilarious dance through the stories and traditions of the holiday season, from "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas," to the Rankin Bass television favorites of the 1960s, including the tale of Gustav the green-nosed reindeer (Rudolph is still under copyright), to the Macy's Christmas Parade, and then some.

The second half of the play is an incredibly rapid splicing of "A Christmas Carol" and "It's a Wonderful Life." Dennis Markam's character changes on the spot from

Scrooge to Jimmy Stewart in order to interact with another character, a great piece of comedy.

"Early in the '70s, three guys came up with a play called 'The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged,' covering all of Shakespeare's plays. They were called the Reduced Shakespeare Company," recalls Storm. "This play could have been [performed] by the Reduced Shakespeare Company; it is as funny as those guys were, in a contemporary setting."

While the script is important in any comedy, timing is everything. The three-man cast - Justin DuPuis, Liam Callister and Markam - look like they are genuinely enjoying themselves, and there is probably a dose of improvisation in the physical delivery of the play, which makes it seem fresh and spontaneous. The comedic timing is perfect as the three men juggle the tens of different costumes, entrances and exits that are needed throughout the play.

It is not DuPuis' first appearance at THT, but it is the first time he shows the various facets of his comedic talent, including slapstick humor. He is funny as a distraught elf, a female newscaster, a fairy, and even as Death itself. Callister is a younger actor full of boyish, sometimes touching, energy. You can tell he thoroughly enjoys playing Gustav the green-nosed reindeer. Markam - the serious one to begin with - quickly cracks up, but still attempts to be the anchor of the show as his two partners go full tilt. The balance of the three is excellent.

The show is Storm's directorial debut at THT. An actor and director, for the last four years he's been the artistic director at Theater First in Berkeley. He previously directed "Every Christmas Story" in 2008 in San Jose and he brings an immediate maturity to the show.

The play is an excellent holiday experience for the whole family, although the existence of Santa is 'seriously' discussed and might be difficult for young believers. For information or to purchase tickets, contact the Town Hall Theatre Box Office at (925) 283-1557 or visit www.TownHallTheatre.com.

"Every Christmas Story Ever Told (And Then Some!)" runs Dec. 7-21, with previews on Dec. 5-6. Showtimes are at 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays; at 3 p.m. (except Dec. 7) and 8 p.m. Saturdays; and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15. Town Hall's Theatre Club will have a free wine and talk-back session with the director and cast immediately following the performance on Friday, Dec. 13.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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