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## 'Can You Ever Forgive Me?' at Orinda Theatre

By Derek Zemrak



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Sometimes life is stranger than fiction. If your friends in Hollywood wrote a script about a popular author who starts forging signatures to pay her rent - no one would believe it. So, this is where the real-life story comes in and makes the new film "Can You Ever Forgive Me?" believable, interesting and enjoyable.

The story is about Lee Israel, brilliantly portrayed by Oscar nominee Melissa McCarthy, who made her living in the 1970s and '80s profiling the likes of Katharine Hepburn, Tallulah Bankhead, Estee Lauder and journalist Dorothy Kilgallen. When Lee is no longer able to get published because she has fallen out of step with current tastes, she turns her art form to deception, abetted by her loyal friend Jack (Richard E. Grant). An adaptation of the memoir "Can You Ever Forgive Me?" relays the true story of the best-selling celebrity biographer.

The film is directed by Marielle Heller ("The Diary of a Teenage Girl") and it truly captures the essence of who Lee Israel was. Yes, she was once a celebrated best-selling author but was also a curmudgeon and a lost soul. McCarthy is stellar in the role of Lee Israel. She will receive an Oscar nomination for the performance. McCarthy is an outstanding actor when given the right script. If you have never seen "St. Vincent," a small indie film from 2014, where McCarthy stars opposite Bill Murray (it is not a comedy), please do yourself a favor and watch it. It is a charming film and one of my all-time favorites. McCarthy is deserving of the Oscar for Best Actress but this year the competition in the female category will be tough with Lady Gaga ("A Star is Born") and Glenn Close ("The Wife"). Any other year McCarthy would be a shoe-in to walk home with a gold statue.

Richard E. Grant also gives an Oscar-worthy performance in the role of Jack, Lee's partner in crime. Grant has had a long career as a character actor in such films as "Gosford Park" and "The Iron Lady." Grant should receive an Oscar nod for the role. He was amazing.

It is that time of year to start seeing all the Oscar contenders. When the Oscar nominations are announced on Tuesday, Jan. 23, you will be hearing "Can You Ever Forgive Me?" read more than once.

"Can You Ever Forgive Me?" - now playing at the Orinda Theatre - is rated R for strong language, brief male nudity, implied sex, plus alcohol and drug use. The film has a total running time of 1 hour and 46 minutes.

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