

'Great Expectations' realized at Town Hall Theatre for the holidays

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Kenneth Greenwell and Salim Razawi in "Great Expectations." Photo Stu Selland

The idea of a Charles Dickens' play for the holiday season brings back memories of adaptations of "A Christmas Carol," of Ebenezer Scrooge, of ghosts, of bad people turned good through the miracle of the heart, and of very touching stories that end well. This winter, Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre has decided to tackle another deeply moral Dickens' story with "Great Expectations." In the words of artistic director Susan Evans, the positive moral values and happy ending of the play capture the spirit of the holiday season, without "beating you over the head with it." The fast and often humorous play is for all audiences.

Set in Victorian England the original novel and its adaptation by Grace Childs Daly tells of the coming of age and redemption of Pip, a young commoner who wants to become a gentleman, and who will discover that what makes the real value of a human being is more in his self-worth than in his social standing. It is also a story of love and revenge that goes from surprise to surprise until

the end.

Over the past 10 years, Town Hall Theatre has grown to successfully tackle complex playwrights. Childs Daly's adaptation of the Dickens' book requires the competent hand of a director to express the complexity of the characters through dives into the past, returns to the present moment, as well as rapid scenery and character changes for the actors. This reporter experienced one of the final rehearsals of the play.

To see actors working on the construction of a show has a charm of its own. Even a few days before opening, it was still controlled chaos, fine-tuning of entrances, exits, changes of costumes; and in the middle of the rapid twirling, the characters emerged through nuggets of dialogue and acting, already fully formed, giving the incongruous spectator the desire to see more.

Director Dennis Markam explained that he chose eight young actors, many new to the Lafayette stage, to energize the dozens of characters of the

play. Almost in "A Christmas Carol" style, Pip is confronted to elements of his past that come out of trunks or armoires, to help him reflect on his prior actions, informing the present moment and the decisions he has to make.

Evans says that when she read Childs Daly's adaptation of "Great Expectations" she was captured by the high energy of what was already her favorite Dickens novel, and saw its great potential for her stage. She decided to give the direction to Markam, who has shown the quality of his craft at THT directing plays such as "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" on the main stage or "Treasure Island" with the middle school cast, also a very fast-paced and complex production.

Markam says that his actors had no difficulty embodying Dickens' rich and complex characters, and enjoy the rapid succession of scenes where characters pop out of trunks like memories that had long been forgotten and suddenly re-emerge. The actors, except for Salim Razawi who plays Pip, embody up to 12 different characters each, a tour de force that had to be synchronized to the millisecond. During the rehearsals, actors learned their choreography just as precisely as their text, entrances and exits having numbers, and props moving fast to precise locations on the stage like a controlled ballet of things.

Razawi, a teaching artist for the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre Outreach program, brings a surprising range and maturity to the young man who starts his life as a poor blacksmith apprentice, becoming an educated gentleman, always believing that his great expectations will materialize. Very young actors from the THT education program participate to the production to personify children in memories of the heroes.

"Great Expectations" opens Nov. 29 and will play through Dec. 16 at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette. More information and tickets are available at www.townhalltheatre.com.

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Service Clubs Announcements

Lafayette Rotary Club

Step in on a Thursday and join us for our lunch meeting.
Thursday at noon Oakwood Athletic Club, 4000 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette.

November 29: Jim Marggraff: Talking about his inventions (Lamorinda Sunrise Rotarian)	December 6: Christmas Luncheon at Lafayette Park Hotel 11:15am-1:30pm
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www.rotarylafayette.org
www.facebook.com/Rotary-Club-of-Lafayette-CA

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DECEMBER MEETINGS

- 7:** Dr. Lorraine Granit on Loving acts of kindness and the White Pony Express
- 7:** "Luv Bug" RAFFLE DRAWING. Holiday Celebration, 4:00-6:30 pm. Downtown Lafayette Plaza Park
- 14:** U.S. House of Representatives Congressman, Mark DeSaulnier serving our district.

Happy Holidays !

◆ Not to be missed ◆ Not to be missed ◆

OTHER.. continued

Hacienda Holiday Faire at the beautiful, historic Hacienda de Las Flores located at 2100 Donald Drive in Moraga from noon to 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 30 and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1 and Sunday, Dec. 2. Enjoy the festive atmosphere and find hand-crafted, specialized items from over 50 local artisans.

Radiance Family Wellness presents their Holiday Gathering and Open House from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Dec. 1 at 914 Dewing Avenue, Lafayette. Complete your holiday shopping while you relax and sip on a cup of homemade chai or mimosas. Meet Radiance Family Wellness practitioners, sample their work and learn more about the healthful products available at RFW. To learn more visit us at www.radiancefamilywellness.com

Saint Mary's College Guild's Christmas Luncheon fundraiser from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Dec. 5 at the Soda Center, Moraga Room. It will feature The award-winning Saint Mary's Choir directed by Dr. Julie Ford and accompanied by Sharon Kim, pianist. Enjoy a raffle for the infamous Christmas money tree along with six other fabulous gift baskets and the delicious annual Bake Sale. All proceeds benefit students applying for financial aid scholarships. Cost is \$45. Send a check made out to SMC Guild addressed to Karen Kinsey, 135 Longfield Place, Moraga, CA 94556. Direct all questions to Karen (925) 376-2225.

The Lamorinda Wine Growers Association is hosting its first annual Holiday Celebration from 6 to 10 p.m. on Dec. 6 at the Serbian Cultural Center, 1700 School Street, Moraga. Join us for local wine, food and dancing to the music of Diamond Dave. Seating is limited and must be 21 to attend. For more information and to register: <https://lamorindawinegrowers.com/eventcalendar/#!event/register/2018/12/6/lamorindawine-growers-association-holiday-party>

Chanukah on Ice from 7:15 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 6 at the Walnut Creek Ice Rink, 1375 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek. Skate around a giant menorah to Chanukah songs and music. Kosher Food concessions will be available.

Moraga's annual Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 7. Enjoy cookies and hot cocoa in the Commons Park at 6:30 p.m. with the tree lighting at 7 p.m.

All women are invited to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," Presbyterian Women's annual Christmas tea to be held from 1 to 3 p.m. on Dec. 7 at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church. There will be musical entertainment as well as a traditional tea. Call (925) 288-9990 for reservations.

Bring the whole family for a holiday Family Movie Night: The Star at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 7 at 10 Moraga Valley Ln., Moraga. Children may come in pj's as we watch many tails tell the greatest story ever. Popcorn will be served. No cost.

"It's a Wonderful Life in Lafayette" community celebration from 4 to 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 7 in Lafayette's Plaza Park, located in downtown Lafayette. This fun and festive event includes visits with Santa, official holiday tree lighting ceremony, live musical entertainment, holiday treats and a holiday sing-along. For more details and the entertainment schedule, please visit www.lafayettechamber.org/holiday.

Kick off holiday shopping in small town style during Lafayette Stroll. Shop and Dine from 6 to 8 p.m. on Dec. 7. Stroll through downtown Lafayette with friends and family while the boutiques are still open! Experience Lafayette at its holiday best, plus street musicians, local artists and Mrs. Claus! For a list of participating merchants, please go to www.lafayettechamber.org.

Girlpreneur Pop-up Shop from 2 to 5 p.m. on Dec. 9 at the Lafayette Community Center. Shop local, girl-owned businesses – everything from all-natural bath products and fashion stationery to hand-made jewelry and magic wands. There's something for everyone!

5A Rent-A-Space presents Santa's Secret Wrapping Room from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 1 through 24. Equipped with colorful paper, ribbon, bows, boxes, scissors and tape. Everything needed to wrap gifts free, without the watchful eyes of the recipients! Open to the public.

Mighty Fine Guitars benefit concert helps fire victims

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Easy: especially in a community with a heart and a (took-some-convincing) voice for giving. Coyle, still resistant to a story about one person's efforts, mentions calls from musicians and emails from community members asking how they can participate. Without a second show option and not wanting to put on a six-hour marathon, he says the

two-set, two-hour concert is firm. Community generosity to meet the needs of fire victims, however, remains ongoing, unlimited and welcome.

For information about the North Valley Community Foundation or Mighty Fine Guitars, visit <https://www.nvcf.org/> and <http://mightyfineguitars.com/> or <http://www.steviecoyle.com/>.

Please submit events:
calendar@lamorindaweekly.com

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