



"In This House" : "acting is absolutely superb, delivering an exciting and emotion-filled story that keeps you engaged from beginning to end!"

Playhouse West unveiled the West Coast Premiere of a touching and thought provoking narrative musical by Sarah Schlesinger, Jonathan Bernstein and Mike Reed entitled, "In This House", this past week in Walnut Creek.

Director Lois Grandi was indeed fortunate to be introduced to Sarah Schlesinger and Mike Reid in June of 2006 through a mutual friend, George Lee Andrews, one of the impresarios whose long term association with Phantom of Opera is legendary. George had been doing readings of this new musical and thought that Lois Grandi's Playhouse West might be the perfect venue for the show's west coast premiere. Lois jumped at the opportunity to work with the show's creators, realizing that this show was insightfully written, with a score and lyrics that were more than likely to soon become a highly sought after award winning production.

"In This House" provides the audience with an opportunity to share a New Year's Eve chance encounter between two families; a young couple who have only been married for three years and an older couple who have spent many, many years together. While both couples are a world apart in their lifestyles, preferences and expectations, they share one very important commonality, the life altering consequences of failing to be completely forthright. Each couple gains a understanding of the importance of honesty through their observation of how dishonesty has affected the other couple.

Johnny D'Amato (played by Darrin Glessner) is a third generation cop and his wife, Annie (played by Lynda DiVito), is a disaster recovery worker who travels around the world helping to save and restore families following natural disasters. Annie has just returned home after completing a recovery mission somewhere else in the world and is planning to spend some private time on this New Year's evening with her husband, after he picks her up at the airport. Her husband, Johnny, has (unbeknownst to his wife) made plans for a big surprise party at his parent's house on this New Year's evening. At this party he plans to reveal to his wife a major decision that he and his father have made, that will alter the couple's life in many ways. This will be an event in which Annie has had little or no input, and no consultation with her husband in the decision making process, a decision that may have deep consequences to their relationship.

On their way home in a wicked snow storm, the D'Amato car leaves the road and crashes into a rock wall in front of an old home in an isolated area. The couple who live in the house, Henry (Michael Harrington) and Luisa (Gretchen Grant), invite this young couple to come in out of the cold and offer them shelter for the evening as they have no telephone or way to get assistance this late in the day. The meeting starts off with a cordial offer of "join us for New Year's Eve and a toast for a promising new year". Very shortly, the "event" Johnny had planned to reveal later that evening at his folk's home, is now revealed to his wife, taking the evening on a downward spiral.

This musical is presented in operatic fashion with the entire story being told in musical verse. The lyrics are exceptionally well written and the story is certainly intriguing. The acting is absolutely superb, delivering an exciting and emotion-filled story that keeps you engaged from beginning to end.

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The music is very good for the most part but a bit repetitive. It is a musical story that has great promise, but leaves me wanting a little bit more, a little more clarity and development in the resolution of the couple's problems. There is nothing in the dialogue at the end that indicates that the younger couple really "gets it", or that they are going to resolve their problems! Even with my slight hesitation, feeling that this is still a work in progress, I highly recommend "In This House" as a very thought-provoking and entertaining show. Director Lois Grandi has brought out the very best in this new work, making it a memorable production.

The set, designed by Jan Zimmerman, is truly remarkable and artfully crafted, providing all the necessary elements that worked very well on this postage stamp sized stage. Costumes by Krista Nelson are in perfect keeping with the story and the characters, executed with careful, thoughtful design.

"In This House" plays Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., with Sunday performances at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., now through March 2nd. The Playhouse West Theatre is located at 1345 Locust Street, Walnut Creek with municipal parking across the street and within walking distance from BART (approximately 6 blocks away). Tickets range in price between \$26 and \$30 each, very reasonable for professional entertainment. Call (925) 942-0300 for reservations and additional information and please visit their website at www.playhousewest.org.

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