



A WEBSITE FOR THE THEATRE WORLD

BOISE U.S.A. Salem K Theatre Company The Matrix Theatre Reviewed by Jose Ruiz

Near the end of its run, the Matrix enjoyed almost a full house on a Saturday night, proof positive that Boise U.S.A. presented by Salem K Theatre Company has captured the imagination of the theatre audience.

Let's begin by giving kudos to the troupe, who performs wonderfully. Especially the two women, who adopt the mentality of the fifties and pull it off in grand style. Audrey Moore as Marjorie Jones, the wife of Dr. Butler, has a bit more oomph in her attitude, being that Marjorie is the daughter of the powerful Mayor "Buck" Jones and feels a little more empowered to stand up to her husband. Melissa Kite as Doris, the abnegated wife of Joe Moore nails the role of a woman caught between her vows of matrimony and the unsettling truth she suddenly faces. Neither woman has easy choices – but both rise above the circumstances to emerge with dignity.

The story deals with homosexuality. Some would say "perversion", but a careful line is drawn by playwright Gene Franklin Smith and director Arturo Castillo, where the character of Dr. Jack Butler, played with some temerity by Scott Victor Nelson, attempts to define the actions of the accused as anomalies rather than immoralities. It's Halloween and the police arrest a youth in a dark alley promptly accusing him of "lewd and lascivious" conduct with another man. Under pressure (perhaps torture?) the youth quickly names names and soon other young men are arrested as Mayor "Buck" Jones promises to clean up the city. George McDaniel does one of the best blustery fat cat politicians we've seen in awhile, and even his charisma can't cover up the Mayor's lust for power. His sidekick Blaine Evans is no better as played by Nic d'Avirro.

In comes Will Fairchild, an FBI man who has a reputation for busting homosexuals (a little like McCarthy and Communists). Fairchild has some

unique ideas and his cigarette theory is a marvel of misplaced logic. Josh T. Ryan captures the essence of the FBI man who is truly a legend in his own mind and finds it easy to push the boundaries of propriety to prove his case.

Joe Moore, a YMCA coach is among the first men to be arrested and his story becomes the pivot from which all other events flow. Kris Kamm plays Joe with a mix of courage, guilt, confusion and despair, making the character one of the most heart rendering and poignant in the piece. The questions that he poses can be asked by some today – the answers will probably still be as muddy, and the misconceptions will continue as long as there are those who are unable or unwilling to accept the feelings of others.

Soon other arrests are made, with the help of Eldon, the cynical youth who was first arrested. He cooperates with the authorities not just for money but for the apparent pleasure of bringing others down. The fact that the lawmen go along with him speaks volumes about their integrity. It soon becomes apparent that many of the men who are being arrested for supposedly participating in sex acts with the teenage boys are the political enemies of Mayor Jones, and the truth begins to unravel in an uncertain path that is more about personal gain than sexual immorality.

One of the best characters is Uncle Herbert Jones, the Mayor's brother. Cameron Mitchell Jr. is wonderful in the role of the wealthy black sheep of the family whose not so secret life has kept him distant from his brother. His connections lead him to discover some important overlooked facts about the case. It is telling that when serious adversity faces the Mayor, Herbert is the first to rally to the aid of the family as he is willing to forget past animosities.

In an unexpected plot twist, Frank Jones, the Mayor's son who is a cadet at West Point, brings a lamentable closure to the sad course of events. Matty Ferraro gives a brief but gripping portrayal of a troubled youth waging a private war with his feelings and emotions.

More a study in homophobia than a look at child abuse or male prostitution, the overall story provides a fascinating time tunnel to an era where America feared things that it did not understand and where morality was measured by a yardstick often designed by those who had the most to gain by its definition. Maybe the ending is a little conventional and the events fold neatly like an origami figure, but it is the kind of play that opens as many questions as it answers and definitely grabs the attention of even the most discerning theatre patrons.

Boise, USA plays through June 29, 2008 at the Matrix Theatre, 7657 Melrose Avenue, West Hollywood CA. For tickets and information call (323) 960-4420 or visit www.salemktheatreco.org or www.plays411.com/boise .

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