

Campbell Express

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

Talented Cast Introduces New Work

By Jennifer Packard

The San Jose Stage Company opened *Lolita Roadtrip*, a new work by local playwright Trevor Allen, to a sell-out audience in downtown San Jose. This modern script has insightful references that caused outbursts of laughter from the audience and commanded silence at opportune moments.

Each actor was superbly cast in their role by Lee Sanokwich, new director to San Jose Stage Company and former Artistic Director of Marin Theatre Company. There was never a hesitation in acting direction, although sometimes a line bobble. The characters were strong and story line interesting and thought provoking.

The show begins with a psychedelic soundtrack and the introduction of our four actors, each sharing facts of the butterfly. We are then brought onto a college campus with Professor Drake (Julian López-Morillas) in his comfort zone, lecturing to his students on sex. López-Morillas's opening monologue has excellent comedic timing and we were welcomed into his story.

Next, Julia Martin (Chloë Bronzan) invites us to join her on a wild roadtrip across America where we learn about the challenges in her life after a mentor relationship went awry, many years ago. The roadtrip consists of visiting the destinations in Nabokov's controversial novel, "Lolita." She has chosen to do her dissertation on this literary work, a novel haunted by memories of a lost adolescent love. Bronzan is a natural in this role. Her performance was flawless. She evolved her character meticulously through this piece, keeping the audience intrigued and supportive of her every action and decision.

On campus, Julia chooses to accept Danny's plea to join her on this self-exploration across America. Although hesitant at first, Julia brings Danny (Patrick Alparone), a GED high school grad, along for the ride. Alparone's portrayal of Danny was captivating. He continued to surprise us, giving a stellar performance.

Together, Bronzan and Alparone made us uncomfortable and gave us peace.

Their relationship on stage was symbiotic. We wanted them to be successful on their journey.

There was an obvious parallel between the Nabokov novel, "Lolita," and Julia's personal experience of being stripped of her youth and innocence. The playwright only gave us bits and pieces of this parallel as we travelled through this work, also bring in another comparison with that of the life cycle of a butterfly. We had to fill in the blanks and let his story unfold, with the realization in the end that he'd tricked us with the subtle sparks created between Julia and Danny. This production left me intrigued to read Nabokov's "Lolita," like when one is pulled to slow down and look at an accident on the side of the freeway, not at all necessary but we are curious.

Stacy Ross had another standout performance in *Lolita Roadtrip*. Not many artists can successfully tackle seven roles within one piece. Her character development of each was impeccable. She easily changed characters to be hilarious within her comedic roles, inspiring as the dying wife and finally, brought is full circle as the level headed detective.

Julian López-Morillas had difficult characters, as we needed to dislike his portrayal of the perverted professor needing our forgiveness and López-Morillas also needed to provide us with the ongoing lectures, as Nabokov, on the life cycle of the butterfly, to maintain the stability of the parallel in Allen's storyline. It would have been nice to see more character growth in López-Morillas in his portrayal of the professor. López-Morillas shone best when on stage in direct confrontation with Bronzan. There were moments when Lopez-Morillas was truly creepy, which was great.

The New Yorker was quoted this when Nabokov's novel was originally published, "The conjunction of a sense of humor with a sense of horror [results in] satire of a very special kind, in which vice or folly is regarded not so much with scorn as with profound dismay and a measure of tragic sympathy...The reciprocal flow of irony gives to both the characters and their surroundings the peculiar intensity of significance that attends the highest art." This, too, is true of Allen's piece, *Lolita Roadtrip*.

It was easy to see why Trevor Allen's *Lolita Roadtrip* was selected to receive the first grant award from PlayGround's New Play Production Fund, supporting Bay Area implementations of new plays. This \$15,000 grant recognizes San Jose Stage Company's ongoing commitment to bringing new stories to the theatre and supporting local artists.

I urge you to go online (www.thestage.org) or to call (408.283.7142) today to purchase tickets to the World Premier of *Lolita Roadtrip* at the San Jose Stage Company. Once the community gets wind of this fabulous production, it will be sold-out. This production only runs through May 1, 2011. Tickets range from \$20-

\$45. Don't procrastinate, contact San Jose Stage Company for your opportunity to be entertained.