

Six Degrees of WOW! at The Western Stage

Joe Truskot, The Salinas Californian 11:17 a.m. PDT October 6, 2016



(Photo: Provided photo by Richard Green)

Talk about theater having its effect on the public! I believe that anyone who attends The Western Stage's production of John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation" is in for a shock — and I don't just mean the episode of full frontal male nudity — I mean the overwhelming impact the work has on the audience. It causes each of us to reflect on our own behavior and question how we use others to make our life better, how we get others to help us gain access to what we seek, to open a door that wouldn't be available to us without the help of someone else. The play which runs until Sunday, Oct.9 is full of just that.

An art dealer uses a rich friend to provide the means for him and his wife to buy an expensive masterwork which they then intend to sell to an even richer client. Treasuring the work of the painter, of course, (who doesn't love Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Cezanne) but treasuring more the money about to be made on that transaction. Katherine Adrian (Ouisa Kittredge) and David Koppel (Flanders Kittredge) are both fantastic, giving spirited and convincing performances displaying the wide range of emotions their roles require.

A persuasive imposter preys on people by using his connection to a former classmate of their children to seek entrance into their lives. Again, Paul Poitier, the famous actor Sidney Poitier's fake son, convinces them he's in control of casting the extras for his father's film version of Cats. He uses the charm of his personality, his inventive mind and attractive body to push deception to the max, getting people to open doors (and wallets) for his personal gain. The truly difficult role of Paul is wonderfully played by Drew Lee Davis-Wheeler.

Lots of strong performances from the Kittredges' friends and their children abound. Joelle McGrath (Kitty), James Brady (Larkin), Ashley Hibbs (Tess Kittredge), Thomas Perry (Woody Kittredge), Roland Shorter (Hustler, Doug), Josh Kaiser (Ben), and Ron Perez (Dr. Fine) are perfectly cast and convey their roles with authority.

Toward the end of the play, Paul finds a young couple who have recently arrived in New York City and spins his evil web around them without remorse. He cheats them out of the little money they have, has sex with Rick, the man, and creates enough angst in this naive boy that results in his taking his own life. Rick is sensitively played by Gabriel Alvizo with Megan Root taking on the part of his suspicious wife Elizabeth convincingly.

Dennis Beasley's direction is masterful holding our attention for the duration. Actors come and go with minimal props on a versatile stage designed by David Parker. It's one of the most beautifully painted sets I've seen yet at The Western Stage. They should auction off Parker's fake two-sided Kandinsky -- it's really that good!

Costumes created by Amanda Jones are attractive and spot on for 1990 New York City in which the play takes place.

The most eloquent monolog comes at the very end. Ouisa finds herself attracted to Paul and concerned about him even though he's lied to and cheated them. She summarizes the existential notion of what she's just been through.

"How every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds. Six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet. But to find the right six people."

Contact Joe Truskot at jtruskot@thecalifornian.com, follow him on Twitter @truskot_salnews and like his Facebook.com/joetruskot page.

Read or Share this story: <http://bit.ly/2dOn0xc>



Get your subscription for as low as **\$9.99/YEAR**

UNLOCK MY \$9.99 OFFER
<http://bit.ly/2dOn0xc>