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Whimsical characters shine in Ross Valley Players comedy about technology



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The preview of Ross Valley Players production of *Dead Man's Cell Phone* on Thursday, March 1 was almost to full capacity as many people braved the rain and chill to enjoy American playwright Sarah Ruhl's original play under the direction of Chloe Bronzan.

Written in 2007 over a decade ago, much of what the play expresses is still relevant today. While the play is a comedy and is whimsical in parts, it speaks of things very profound.

A woman (Jean) at a café hears a cell phone ringing and ringing and ringing and so she persistently asks the man sitting at the table next to her to answer his phone. But to her dismay, she discovers he is dead. In order to stop the phone from ringing, she answers it and inadvertently gets pulled into the stranger's life.

While the cast of characters is small – only six in total, the depth of the questions and the complexities of the unfolding dynamics are many. Who really was this dead man? What was his line of work? And, most of all, the question might be who really loved him? Did his wife love him? Did his very opinionated mother or his brother love him? Perhaps, it is only Jean who really loved him. Her impetuous reaction to answer his phone, turns into a sense of compassion as Jean takes it upon herself to convey that Gordon Gottlieb, the dead man, truly cared about those he loved.

Somehow Jean's little embellishments become an entanglement of half-truths and then outright lies; whether intentional or not – she can't stop. She gets involved deeper and deeper. The small ensemble works well together. Along with Deborah Murphy as Jean in the lead, Steve Price portrays the dead man Gordon, Christine Macomber plays Gordon's bombastically opinionated mother – Mrs. Gottlieb, Peter Warden portrays Dwight his brother, Marilyn Hughes plays Hermia, Gordon's wife and Nan Ayers takes on two roles – that of the "Other Woman" – a mistress and "a mystery woman" who appears at the airport.

Together, despite all their eccentricities as characters in this unique play, they are all very charming.

Each of Ruhl's characters give something profound to convey with regards to technology and the impacts it makes upon society. The director Chloe Bronzon, believes with every technological advancement comes a price – such as it is in this modern world. She notes, that the playwright Sarah Ruhl examines the cost of technology through her delightfully quirky and eloquent script. It is up to us to have an awareness of that price, so that we can proceed mindfully.”

Bronzon went on to say, “this is precisely why I love live theatre and I would argue that it more it's more needed now than ever before. How appropriate, said Bronzon that this particular story is told in the form of a play”

Existentially speaking, the play examines how we are genuinely connected, even when lonely or alienated. Almost each character has a thought-provoking monologue that is both witty and tender; while at times expressing irony.

Sarah Ruhl's little play appeared Off-Broadway but went on to be performed by the Stepenwolf Theatre a year after its debut in 2007 and since then has been presented by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and The Arches in Glasgow, across the Atlantic in the U.K.

The barn theater's rustic open stage – no curtains and minimal set design, lends itself to small productions, like this one. The barn allows the audience to experience more fully the intimate details of a storyline such as *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, the fourth selection in Ross Valley Player's 88th season.

This is live theater coming right from the heart, which had the audience laughing at the get go, and thinking a bit about life's deeper meaning as well.

Performances are every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday (matinee) from March 2 to March 25. For tickets visit the Ross Valley players website: www.RossValleyPlayers.com or call [415-456-9555](tel:415-456-9555).

-Written and submitted by Jonathan Farrell, a freelance journalist in the SF Bay Area

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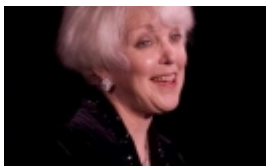
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