

# George Bernard Shaw's 'Candida' at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Alan Coyne (Lexy), Derek Robertson Fischer (Morell), and Maggie Mason (Candida). Photo Stu Selland

There is something intimate and special about witnessing the rehearsal of a play close to opening night; the actors have memorized the script, their performance is almost set, the emotion is there, but some of the choreography is still in the making – and one literally sees a story being born.

The provocative and witty characters of "Candida" in George

Bernard Shaw's 1894 play about a classic love triangle, which opens May 24 at Town Hall Theatre, are played by young actors, many of them new to THT, bringing a lively charm and delightful humor to the Lafayette stage. The story, set in Victorian England, tells of the turmoil that results from the intrusion of a young romantic poet into the lives of a well-established clergyman and his

charming wife, Candida.

"The biggest idea in this play is the relationship between love, marriage, domesticity, and poetic love," says director Molly Aaronson-Gelb. "Shaw is asking the ways those go together and how we make compromises." The play is totally relevant today, she says, both as an explanation to young people that moving out of the "honeymoon phase" is a more

rewarding part of married life, and as a reminder that you can feel an attraction to people outside of your marriage. "Temptation will exist, always," she says. "It's the covenant that you make with your partner, the faith you put in each other, that preserves the harmony of the relationship."

Aaronson-Gelb, who is the co-artistic director at Just Theater in Berkeley, has directed many new plays by local playwrights. She is a native of the Bay Area, and was offered this direction by former THT artistic director Clive Worsley (now replaced by Joel Roster), who has great respect for her work.

The group of actors functions very well together; their liveliness highlights the humor that Shaw put into the play. "At the core of the story is the idea that this very strong, confident man, Pastor Morell (played by Derek Robertson Fischer), has his confidence toppled by an 18-year-old boy," says the director. "Morell for me reads like a giant football player, a popular man in a constant positive feed-back loop who suddenly realizes that it happened through the work of others, and he should not take his privilege for granted."

Luke Meyers plays the young poet, Eugene Marchbanks, who challenges Morell. "He has collapsible ankles," says Aaronson-Gelb of the actor. "He melts and puddles all over the floor in a simply delightful way."

The center of their rivalry, Candida, is played by Maggie Mason. A lovely actress, she also has smarts and poise. "Maggie Mason had an immediate connection with the language and Candida's irreverence," says Aaronson-Gelb. "She says that her husband is the master of the house, but that she is the one who made him so. I think that Shaw, in all honesty, was trying to say that women have power, and they create environments and opportunities."

Shaw, without being a real feminist, supported the right of women to vote and believed they should have a more powerful role in society. In the play, Candida is the central anchor; she does not change, while the two men around her realize things about themselves as they examine their love and relationship with her.

"Candida" will play at Town Hall Theatre from May 24 to June 12 with previews on May 22 and 23. For tickets and more information, visit [www.townhalltheatre.com](http://www.townhalltheatre.com).

## Cal Shakes Turns 40

Season opens tonight

By Lou Fancher



From left: Ryan Nicole Peters as Ruth, Zion Richardson as Travis, Marcus Henderson as Walter, and Margo Hall as Lena in Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun," directed by Patricia McGregor, playing at Cal Shakes May 21-June 15. Photo Kevin Berne

Cal Shakes is getting ready to prove that turning 40 is glorious.

Orinda's outdoor Bruns Amphitheater will bristle during California Shakespeare Theater's 40th anniversary season, running May 21 to September 28. Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone recently announced the season: Lorraine Hansberry's American classic, "A Raisin in the Sun;" William Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors;" George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion;" and The Bard's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Why bristle? Because audiences

who've sipped Sauvignon Blanc while fanning themselves in July's heat, or bundled into a blanket on a late September evening, know that true temperature-testing occurs onstage, as much as in the seats. Led by Moscone's boisterous charge towards theater that engages, enriches and even agonizes or enrages human imagination, the atmosphere isn't just "outdoor theater," it's fearlessly so.

In classic and contemporary masterworks, the acting company – adept avoiders (or swallows) of bugs and overcomers of auditory conflicts with occasional airplanes passing overhead or cattle on the venue's golden hill

backdrop – parade their consistent artistic depth. An array of technical skills has endeared the actors to the Bay Area's knowledgeable, opinionated theater-goers. Crisp, highly-individual directors and rarely-praised-enough costume, set, lighting and sound designers, complete the package. And yet, there's more: Philippa Kelly, Cal Shake's terrific resident dramaturg, Susie Falk, managing director and inspiring "Peet's Coffee & Tea!" prompter, Clive Worsley, director of artistic learning and former Town Hall Theatre director, and a staff one must resort to a cliché to describe, by using

the term "crackerjack."

If not every production is a bell-ringer, it's more a matter of personal taste than timid direction or lack of talent, which is exactly as professional theater should be.

"Every year, as we figure out a new season of work up at the Bruns, I want to provide as surprising and dynamic a roster of works of theater for as many people as possible," Moscone said, in a season announcement. "I'm thrilled to present this eclectic and varied slate of plays as we move forward with our commitment to making theater that resonates with the broad community of diverse audiences throughout the Bay Area."

Starting off the season, Patricia McGregor returns to direct "A Raisin in the Sun," after recent stints directing the company's "A Winter's Tale" (2013) and "Spunk" (2012). The play, a rigorous exploration of prejudice, poverty and racism set in 1950's Chicago, opened at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 11, 1959, and ran for 350 performances over 19 months. Marking the first time a play written by an African American woman was produced on Broadway, Hansberry's contribution to playwriting offers indisputable evidence of the enduring themes – many of them troubling – in America's history.

"Slapstick" is a word frequently applied to The Comedy of Errors, one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies about twins separated at birth. Director Aaron Posner has proven he's unafraid of strong choices (his 2009 "A Midsummer Night's Dream" spiraled in unexpected fashion) and adept at

discovering new ways to tell oft-told stories. With program notes and casting to come, it's all fingers crossed that associate artists (Danny Scheie, Dan Hiatt, L. Peter Callender, Catherine Castellanos, to name just four) will be on the playbill.

In July, Moscone goes musical with "Pygmalion," George Bernard Shaw's most famous comedy – and the basis for the play and subsequent film, "My Fair Lady." Attending pre-show "Grove Talks" prior to any performance is a fantastic way to get a foothold on the productions. But this year's "Inside Tech" rehearsal (the familiar "Inside Scoop" talk normally held in the Orinda Library), with Moscone and the entire cast (hearts beat for associate artists Stacey Ross, James Carpenter, Julie Eccles and more) and the crew for "Pygmalion," on Friday, July 25, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the amphitheater, is the summer's best free – yes, that's no typo: free and it comes with ice cream – ticket.

The company will conclude the season with director Shana Cooper and choreographer Erika Chong Shuch joining forces to spin out "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Cooper and Shuch have both worked with the company before and the promise of their partnership turns the bitter thought of the season's end into sweet reward.

In addition to the usual ticketing and calendar information, the website offers useful tips about amenities, special events, age-appropriate productions (children under age four are not permitted) and even how to access up-to-date weather tweets. For information, visit [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org).

## Wagner Ranch Elementary Presents 'Oliver!'

Submitted by Robyn Lewis



"Cast A" will perform at 4 p.m. Friday, June 6 and at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 7. Photos provided



"Cast 1" will perform at 7 p.m. Friday and 3 p.m. Saturday.

Lights, camera, action! Wagner Ranch Elementary School proudly presents its annual spring musical, "Oliver!" Friday and Saturday, June 6-7. Sure to be a theatrical event that will be enjoyed by audiences of all ages, "Oliver!" is Charles Dickens' classic tale of an orphan

who runs away from the orphanage and hooks up with a group of boys trained to be pickpockets by an elderly mentor. Director Ron Pickett, producers Ara Jelalian, Ursula Jost, and Julia Meckas, and musical accompanist Tania Johnson, have been working with the fourth and

fifth grade actors at Wagner Ranch for months. Show times are 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Friday and 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Saturday. Tickets can be purchased at the door or online at [www.showTix4u.com](http://www.showTix4u.com): \$12 reserved, \$10 general seating.