

Play With Multiple Meanings Now At Lab Theater

by Di Saggau

Talk about an interesting play and a great learning experience, *The Plague*, now showing at Laboratory Theater of Florida, certainly falls into that category.

Based upon the book by French author Albert Camus, this is a new translation and stage adaptation by local playwright Louise Wigglesworth. My hat is off to you, Louise. To take an over 400-page book and boil it down to a two-act play, running about 90 minutes in total length, is quite a feat.

The novel, published in 1947, is believed to be based on the 1840s cholera epidemic that killed a large percentage of the population in Oran, a city in French North Africa. It's considered an existentialist classic and has been read as a metaphorical treatment of the French resistance to Nazi occupation during World War II.

As the play opens, there is a ominous feeling when a young man sweeps a rat off the street. Soon, there are hundreds of rats and the sound effects are chilling. The main character is Dr. Rieux, played with great sensitivity by Steve Chase. He treats the victims and is the first to use



Jonathan Percy as Gypsy and Ken Ruisi as Cottard

the word plague to describe the disease. A tireless worker, his duties weigh heavily upon him knowing that the struggle against death is one he cannot win.

There is an effective use of voice-overs throughout the play to help explain what is taking place. A radio announcer gives updates about how 300 rats are found in a factory, and the numbers soon grow to the thousands. Then, the rats seem to be gone... but what follows is death, quarantines and burials. Watching how the various characters react is an emotional experience.

There are 15 actors and many play multiple roles. Robin Murray is Tarrou, a kind woman who assists the doctor. Stephen E. Hooper is Joseph Grand, a would-be author who can only rewrite the first sentence over and over again. Jonathan Perez is a gypsy whose character softens after his son dies. Ken Ruisi is Cottard, a man of many moods. Dave Yudowitz is Father Paneloux, and his sermons are powerful.

Others in the cast are Spencer Barney, Chris Cooper, Alan Barat, Louise Wigglesworth, Kahlil De Weever, Dale Hoover, Halle Rainey, Leana Rachelle Simpson and Jessica Hicks who performs a brief, beautiful dance scene at the end of the first act.

The Plague is a haunting tale of human resilience in the face of daunting circumstances. Directed by Annette Trossback, artistic director for Lab Theater, this is a play with multiple meanings and one that will stay with you for a long time. I highly recommend seeing it.

The show runs through Saturday, May 26 at 8 p.m., with a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, May 20. For tickets, visit www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com or call 218-0481. Lab Theater is located at 1634 Woodford Avenue, at the corner of Second Street and Woodford in Fort Myers.✽

Poetry Reading At Gallery During Music Walk Night

ArtPoems co-founders Lorraine Vail and Joe Pacheco will lead several ArtPoets in celebration of Fort Myers Music Walk Night and the ArtPoems exhibit at the Arts for ACT Gallery. The readings will take place at 7:30 and 8:15 p.m. this Friday, May 18.

The ArtPoems exhibit will continue at the Arts for ACT Gallery for the entire month of May. ArtPoems is a collaboration between poets and artists to produce new poems and works of art.

For more information, contact the gallery at 337-5050 or www.artsforact-gallery.com, or contact Joe Pacheco at 472-1280. For additional details on ArtPoems, visit www.artpoems.org.✽

Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum Exhibit Renovations Planned

The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum is currently renovating the Raymond Burr Memorial Exhibit, established in memory of the deceased actor prior to his death in 1993. The exhibit, currently housed in the lower level of the museum, will be relocated into the Great Hall of Shells and will feature newly acquired shells from his personal collection as well as memorabilia from Mr. Burr's very illustrious career.

Idyllic and isolated South Seas islands were magnets for Burr, who in 1965 purchased Naitamba Island in Fiji. There, he and his partner, Robert Benevides, collected shells as a relaxing hobby. Mr. Benevides recently donated items from his personal collections to the museum to support the renovation of the exhibit about Burr.

The actor, most popular for his roles on the television series *Perry Mason* and *Ironside*, spent many hours on Sanibel as benefactor and fundraiser for the museum. As an early supporter of the museum, Burr chaired its first capital campaign and graciously hosted several fundraisers. The museum established the Raymond Burr Memorial Garden to recognize his pivotal role in helping to establish the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum.✽



Raymond Burr

The Art of Island Dining

The JACARANDA

Sophisticated Dining - Raw Bar - Screened Patio

JAC BAR

Cocktail Lounge - Live Music
1223 Periwinkle Way - Sanibel Island - 239-472-1771
www.JacarandaOnSanibel.com