

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Of People, Plays, and Playhouses

Sylvie · Tuesday, May 15th, 2018

As written, Amy Herzog's Hitchcockian *Belleville* is a thriller packed with intentionally false leads and misleading real ones that keep you guessing while inducing a fair amount of palpitations. Or so it should. Yet despite such predictable horror tropes as blood, a knife and a bathroom that spells *Psycho* at every turn, the recent Pasadena Playhouse production of the play, staged by Jenna Worsham, displayed little of this necessary tension. Performed on a nifty Parisian apartment set by David Meyer, lead actors Anna Camp and Thomas Sadoski went through all the right motions as a young married couple living at unexplained odds with each other in the upscale Paris neighborhood that gives the play its title, while sparking too few anticipated chills.

So be it. More important today, however — since the play closed this past Sunday — is to see it in the context of the relatively new tenure of Producing Artistic Director Danny Feldman, formerly Managing Director/Executive Director of New York's Labyrinth Theater Company.



Feldman bravely took on leadership of the 100-year-old Playhouse roughly a year ago, along with its troubled finances. He has been working since on finding balance: needed financial solutions and locating the heart of this Playhouse's shifting constituency, and ways to marry the two. To this end, he's embraced a pragmatic eclecticism that might map out the way for him to get there.

No one promised it would be easy. After a ho-hum start last year with an *Our Town* signed and spoken, followed in November by a scintillating *King Charles III* (opulently designed by said David Meyer) and, more recently, a wild *Pirates of Penzance* that was a trip and a half, Feldman is... still searching.

I, for one, am prepared to cut him all the slack he needs. After all, in the scheme of things he's just getting started and he seems to have the energy and commitment to make of this elegant Playhouse the purveyor of fine theatre it deserves to be. Ironically (and not unhelpfully), The Playhouse received a generous million-dollar building-renovation gift from Sacramento in honor of its centennial and, yes, the old lady has never looked better.

For this, one is deeply grateful.

But ... it would be good to see cities and states find ways to help nourish the beast within. Because theatre isn't just sticks and stones, but a living membrane. The art it delivers needs feeding too. Endowing buildings is nice; endowing companies is nicer. Artists have to eat and if we can't

provide, we all lose.



Next up in Feldman's ongoing quest: Culture Clash's *Bordertown Now* (May 30-June 24), some satirical clowning that features those political comics Ric Salinas & Herbert Sigüenza, with new material provided by Richard Montoya.

This Culture Clash reunion of sorts around the hot-button issue of immigration will be interrupted on June 9 for a noon-10pm block party celebrating the Playhouse's Centennial. It is free and is there to be shared with everyone in the neighborhood and the world beyond.

Come one, come all, as the beat goes on.

Top Image: Thomas Sadoski and Anna Camp in Belleville at The Pasadena Playhouse.

Program cover for the latest reunion of Pasadena Playhouse alumni & associates. Art courtesy of Peggy Ebright.

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