

JAZZ AGE ANXIETY

Oregon Contemporary Theatre presents *The Great Gatsby*

Lavish parties, love, murder, truth and ennui: F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 tale of the amoral moneyed class continues to raise questions in a new century.

Tangled up in someone else's messy, selfish love triangle, Nick Carraway is simultaneously dazzled and disgusted by the wealthy residents of Long Island. His questions of money, power and what some people expect to be able to buy in this world are particularly apt in 2014.

The Great Gatsby is the Eugene Public Library's Big Read project for 2014. Throughout March and April there will be lectures, films, music and all sorts of fun illuminating the time and themes of Fitzgerald's novel. Oregon Contemporary Theatre is contributing this staged production.

There is something absolutely thrilling about being in a room full of people who've all read the same book, collectively holding their breath to see what happens when they engage with the story this time. Simon Levy's elegant adaptation of the novel does not disappoint. Working in the same spirit of Levy's adaptation is a design team, led by Director Elizabeth Helman, which enhances the clean lines of the script with sparse staging and inspired projections.

But producing a play full of iconic characters is always a gamble. When a book is recrafted and set on the stage, the performance team is measured against each audience member's individual imagination. Helman's actors manage to override preconceived notions, elbowing their way into our collective understanding of the story.

The greatest strength of this production is its women. Shannon Coltrane is perfectly cast, delivering a frail,

calculating and hopeless Daisy Buchanan. Katie Worley very effectively plays golf star Jordan Baker in layers of confidence that are just beginning to shred around the edges. Sarah Clausen's vulgar Myrtle Wilson is strong in her own right, but she also serves to further illuminate the characters playing against her.

Steve Coatsworth as Nick Carraway, the tale's voice, is as charming, sincere and unreliable as our own inner narrators.

Andrew Beck does a nice job of acting like Jimmy Gatz acting like Jay Gatsby, bringing a stronger sense of vulnerability to the role than most. At times, however, he seemed too young and too soft for the role. Tom Wilson's work ethic as an actor is reflected in a particularly moving performance of George Wilson. Tony Stirpe's oily Tom Buchanan makes your skin crawl.

While the costumes, staging and projections are gorgeous, culminating in a stunning visual finish, there should be more people on stage. The actors are asked to do too much, moving props and peopling party scenes. In most plays this sort of movement can be overlooked, but not by this particular group of characters. We expect Tom

SHANNON COLTRANE AS DAISY BUCHANAN AND KATIE WORLEY AS JORDAN BAKER IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*



Buchanan to be carrying a drink, but lugging around the entire bar doesn't work. Helman could have flooded the stage with another half a dozen actors in servant's uniform to move the furniture, pull a quick change and come back to liven up the party scenes.

The Great Gatsby is such a compelling tale, with its delicious luxury rotting the characters into the lowest form of moral sludge. This production takes the novel's essential elements and distills them to a heady strength, knocking us down and leaving us with a literary hangover for the weekend as we sit with these awful and wonderful characters. ■

The Great Gatsby runs through March 22 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre; \$15-\$30.

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