

Last Resort Players earn top grades for Master Class

"Master Class"

Review

BY BURNEY GARELICK

before the FEC was built in 1996 and frequently since then. Schmidt has been a tireless and loquacious supporter of the arts and the humanities.

When Callas realized her premier voice was faltering, she wasn't ready to retire. She had more to say, if not to sing.

So, for a few months in 1971 and 1972, she taught master classes to opera students at Julliard School in New York City. Such was her world-class reputation that people bought tickets to watch her teach, browbeat, humiliate and inspire the students.

Callas' master classes were the genesis for McNally's "Master Class." Callas gave her final performance in 1974 and died in 1977 at age 53.

Annie Schmidt is not an opera singer, but she does have pedagogical experience in real life and on stage.

At least a decade ago in an LRP production, she gave instruction in a hilarious song and dance, "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," a gangsta rap from "Kiss Me Kate," Cole Porter's take on the Bard's "Taming of the Shrew."

In 2015 LRP cast Schmidt in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" as the Stage Manager to instruct

restless souls on the vicissitudes of life.

Thus, armed with experience on stage and off, ambition, determination, and *mut* — Callas' favorite German word for courage — Schmidt was ready to tackle La Divina, as Callas was called.

"Master Class" is not as much about singing and opera as it is about the drama of life, of finding yourself — your look, Callas stresses — who you are beyond your appearance, what you stand for and against, grasping your passion and pursuing it to become the best you can be.

In effect, it is the ultimate graduation address.

Of course Callas' passion was music and she pursued it without compromise.

Callas' road to The Metropolitan Opera and La Scala was a bumpy one, fraught with jealous rivals, weight problems, and two wealthy, overbearing, arrogant men — Battista Meneghini, her much older husband who ran her career, and Aristotle Onassis, her abusive thuggish paramour who didn't even like opera.

Her story unfolds in the master class when certain music evokes memories. At those

moments, her students retreat and the stagelights dim.

Videos of Callas are projected on a big screen, and her elegant voice soars.

At other moments gruff masculine voices rumble over the crowd — exasperated, taunting voices that made her life miserable and broke her heart.

In truth, the play is a monologue, a probing of Callas' psyche. The other five players are place marks for her self-examination. They do, however, illuminate her character.

Callas was not the nicest person. She hadn't a lot of empathy for her students. She didn't refrain from hurling insults, however much she insisted they were for the greater good.

The dialogue throughout is tight, brisk, cutting and witty, masterfully written. And Schmidt is La Divina in her own right.

Three nervous opera students have come for lessons from La Divina, who wastes no time putting them in their places.

She devastates Sophie (Joanie Schmidt, no relation to Annie), who is barely able to sing her chosen song. La Divina tries hard to throw Tony the tenor (Patrick Rowley) under the bus because sopranos hate

tenors, and she sends Sharon (Sheena Moore) off stage in terror and into the bathroom to vomit.

How do the students cope with their teacher? That would be telling. What can be said is that all three actors are exceptional singers, and their songs will knock your socks off.

The students are accompanied by estimable pianist Jennifer Weier on the FEC grand.

You'll hear some terrific piano, even though La Divina is not kind to Weier's character, Manny.

Even the Stagehand (Mary Conley) is harassed by La Divina, who demands a footstool, a cushion and a glass of

water as if she were the Queen of Sheba.

Callas ruled the roost when it came to performing and teaching, but she remained true to herself and her art. She had *mut*. It was her legacy.

Top grades to LRP director Leah Goodwin and her production team. "Master Class" is a triumph.

A half hour before show time June 9 to 11 and June 16 to 18, there will be a pre-concert talk when Florence opera aficionado Linda Yoder will whet your whistle for the art of song that possessed Maria Callas.

The talk is free, but if you don't already have a ticket to the show, you may be enticed to buy one.

If you thought school was out, hold on. The Last Resort Players (LRP) added one more course to the curriculum.

But this one's easy, and it'll only take a couple of hours this weekend or next. Besides, you'll get to grade the teacher, hear some great music, and have some fun.

So, follow the crowd to the Florence Events Center flat floor and take a seat June 10 and 11 or June 16 to 18 for "Master Class", an award-winning play by Terrence McNally.

Your instructor, the playwright, will not be there, but LRP will make his words sing.

Singing is what this play is all about.

Maria Callas was a rock star, an international opera singer and an inspiring if intimidating singing teacher.

Callas is portrayed by Florence rock star Annie Schmidt who has been on stage since LRP originated in 1993,

Yachats Ladies Club to host benefit dinner

The Yachats Ladies Club is inviting the community to attend and support a fun, fundraising Pulled Pork Dinner Benefit for the Yachats Youth and Family Activities Program Summer Programs.(YYFAP)

The YYFAP is known for providing wonderful enriching activities for the children and families in the area and have created some unexpected opportunities for children during the summer months.

The dinner will be served on Saturday, June 17, from 5 to 7p.m. at the YLC Clubhouse which is located at 286 W. 3rd Street, Yachats.

The YLC benefit dinner includes Pulled Pork Sandwiches with coleslaw and a dill pickle, baked beans, potato salad, apple-sauce cake and choice of coffee or tea.

The cost for the dinner is \$15 at the door.

To go dinners will be available as well.

The Pulled Pork Dinner Benefit to support the YYFAP Summer Programs is an entertaining and fun way to help the community while enjoying a delicious home made dinner while visiting with neighbors and meeting new folks.

Women interested in creating fundraisers for the community while enjoying themselves are invited to inquire about membership in this 90 year old group by calling Sandy Dunn at 541-547-3205. If there are questions regarding the pulled pork Dinner Benefit for the Yachats Youth and Family Activities Program Summer Programs, please call 541-547-5425.

DEADLINE FOR PRESS RELEASES IS EVERY MONDAY AND THURSDAY BY NOON. EMAIL PRESSRELEASES@THESIUSLAWNEWS.COM.

Serving our community for over 15 years.



WELLS
TREE & LANDSCAPE
541-999-5083

Tree Removal & Trimming
Brush Cutting & Maintenance
"Making Friends One Job at a Time."
licensed, bonded, insured CCB 183908



THREE RIVERS
CASINO RESORT

Florence Oregon
Ranked #1 MOST BEAUTIFUL TOWN IN AMERICA
Expedia

FATHER'S DAY GIVEAWAY
DRAWING IN FLORENCE SUNDAY, JUNE 18TH
WIN A MAVERICK X3 FOR DAD!

EARN ENTRIES
MAY 25TH - JUNE 18TH

Paperback
Writer

THE BEATLES
Experience

IN FLORENCE
SATURDAY, JULY 15 7PM
& SUNDAY, JULY 16 4PM

TICKETS START AT \$14.99

Things are luckier here! · FLORENCE · COOS BAY · 877-374-8377 · THREERIVERSCASINO.COM

Breaking news, photo galleries and MORE!

Visit the Siuslaw News Online at WWW.THESIUSLAWNEWS.COM