



Same as
we ever
were

One of the ladies of the Homestead Brothel (played by Alyssa Larson) entertains the sheriff (Zac Yurkovic) as the town drunk (Steve Staples) looks on in *The Madam and the Mayor's Wife*.

PHOTO BY JOE HILSEE

Local playwright explores roles of the sexes through the lens of the oldest profession

Sex sells. It's a truism so trite that, when hearing it, we may well roll our eyes, snort derisively, and utter a dismissive “duh” under our breath. And yet, for most people, the actual selling of sex is still regarded as fairly taboo.

by
Carey Wilson

Review:
The Madam and the Mayor's Wife shows Thursday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m., through May 18.
Tickets: \$15 (Thursdays, pay what you can)

Blue Room Theatre
139 W. First St.
895-3749
blueroomtheatre.com

This daring production is the world premiere of *The Madam and the Mayor's Wife*, an original play by local playwright Hilary Tellesen. Her wonderfully detailed, character-driven and multilayered script is set in Grass Valley at the dawn of the 20th century, and it delivers a fully realized portrait of people living through a crisis of morals, economy and personal ethics. There are quite a few heartfelt laughs woven into the fabric of the drama as well.

In addition to creating a richly detailed setting and style for the play, designer, scenic artist and costumer Amber Miller makes one of her rare but always rewarding appearances on the boards as the hard-drinking, profanity-hurling Madame Pearl. She's the proprietor of the Homestead Brothel, an establishment that's been ensuring that “men's cocks get attended to” for so long that it's become a fixture in the town. Providing couture for the ladies is dressmaker Fannie (Leesa Palmer), whose business puts her at the uneasy junction between “respectable” women and the ladies of the brothel (including Alice and Cat, played with verve by Blake Ellis and Alyssa Larson, respectively) who provide her

with much of her business.

Representing the male contingent are the town drunk (Steve Staples), the sheriff (Zac Yurkovic), the doc (Richard Cross) and Mayor Quincy (Joe Hilsee). Yurkovic's lawman is a good-time Charlie who enjoys the benefits and drinks of the Homestead while also appearing to sympathize with the need to maintain law and order, while Cross' character is a sentimental weeper who does his best to administer health care to the ladies of the house.

Hilsee's mayor is the epitome of conflicted affection, morals, lust and political aspiration, a man torn between his past love of Pearl, his politically motivated commitment to his wife, and his passion to deflower the whorehouse orphan, Addie (Sierra Hall).

Tellesen herself takes the role of Mrs. Quincy, the mayor's wife. And it is through her character that the interaction between womanly outrage at masculine selfishness and denial (as manifested in her husband), and feminine shrewdness and compassion (as manifested by Pearl), is explored with much humanistic insight.

Tellesen's script, aided by the direction of Lara Tenckhoff, skillfully reveals each character's depth and personal history through realistic conversation and interaction. And two of the dramatically interesting and successful aspects of the staging are the use of complementary secondary scenes in the shadows of the main action, and the presence of musicians—a powerful duo made up of local singer/songwriters Lisa Marie Hiatt and Heather Ellison—playing gorgeous, original, period-evoking music live in the brothel.

By setting her play more than a century ago, Tellesen has created a distance of perspective that allows a contemporary audience to laugh at the outdated foibles of Victorian morality. But through her insightful rendering of these characters' very personal conflicts of affection, loyalty and desires, Tellesen gives the audience a chance to identify and maybe contemplate the nature of the male and female roles we play. □

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