

Noir on the Ridge



Desiree St. Claire (Sarah Brown) presents her case to Det. Frank Ellery (Jeff Hohimer).
PHOTO BY JAY JAMES

Paradise theater plays through the blackout

Not many plays could survive a power blackout at intermission, but to Paradise's Theatre on the Ridge, which survived the Camp

Fire, the show must go on, right?

by
Robert Speer

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Review:
Pulp shows Thursday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, 2 p.m., through June 23. Tickets: \$12-\$16

Theatre on the Ridge
3735 Neal Road,
Paradise
877-5760
totr.org

That true grit served it well on Saturday (June 8), when PG&E pulled the plug powering a large swath of the Sierra foothills. It did so, it said, to lessen the chance of another uncontrollable fire breaking out because of the wind—not that there's much left to burn in Paradise. PG&E did provide advance notice of the possible shut-off, giving the TOTR troupe time to set up a backup flood light for the evening's showing of the noir mystery/comedy *Pulp*. While it couldn't salvage Gary Kupp's clever spot-lighting design that added so much to Act One, at least the big light enabled the actors to finish Act Two, much to the delight of the audience.

(By the way, when director Jerry Miller surveyed the crowd just prior to the performance, the theater was

more than half full, a good turnout for a company that has lost most of its Paradise base. In fact, all but about six of the attendees did not live on the Ridge. To Miller, that so many people drove to Paradise from elsewhere was an encouraging sign of how broad the theater's fan base is.)

Set in Los Angeles in 1933, Joseph Zettelaier's play is an often hilarious send-up of film noir and the pulp fiction popular during the 1930s and '40s. As it opens, Frank Ellery (Jeff Hohimer), a has-been detective who never was, is sitting in his office, like Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, when a sexy dame (Sarah Brown) with an unlikely name, Desiree St. Claire, walks in and hires him to solve a murder mystery.

Turns out St. Claire is a writer of pulp romance novels, and the dead man, Bernie Wolcott, was her literary agent. Wolcott was also the agent of three other writers of pulp fiction: Bradley Rayburn (Eric Ricketts), science fiction; R A Lyncroft (Tony Varicelli), horror; and Walter Kingston-Smith (Christopher Jones), hero pulps. The four writers were Wolcott's only clients, and he was blackmailing every one of them, so to Ellery they were all suspects.

The genius of *Pulp* is in its structure. As Ellery follows the threads that will lead to the unmasking of the killer, he goes

to each of their abodes, plunging us into the worlds of their novels. Lyncroft, for example, is creepy like someone out of the Addams family, while Rayburn, the sci-fi nerd, wears a crazy space helmet with colorful lights going on and off. Kingston-Smith sashays into his scenes like a bizarre Batman, half hiding behind his cape, and St. Claire works her romantic charms on Ellery, who can't seem to decide whether she's a murderer or a lover.

This is all great fun, and very funny at times. Zettelaier also injects some romantic tension into the tale, as Ellery and St. Claire work their way to love—or at least sex—in the midst of all this absurdity.

Hohimer's Ellery has a voice like Humphrey Bogart's, and his character has a sly wit that gives everything he says extra meaning. His encounters with Brown, who makes an excellent St. Claire, are dripping with double entendres, and his first-person off-stage narration has an appropriately noir tone.

Pulp sets a frenetic pace, with set changes every few minutes. Sometimes the noise of moving furniture overwhelmed Ellery's narration, but that's a fixable problem. Otherwise, this is a terrific show. I urge Chico theater-goers to make that short trip up the hill to support TOTR and enjoy this delightful production. □

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Boochcraft hard kombucha \$1 off all week.
Bill's Towne Lounge, 135 Main St. billstownelounge.com

Bottles at The Lab
Half off the purchase of bottles of wine all week.
The Lab Bar & Grill, 250 Cohasset Road, Ste. 10. labbarandgrill.com

Chardonnay and Cheese Flight
Try Poppy with goat cheese, Shooting Star with blue cheese and William Hill with brie for \$15 all week.
Butte County Wine Co., 1440 Myers St., Oroville.

Ciders at The Banshee
A dollar off all ciders all week.
The Banshee, 134 W. Second St.

Date Nights and Wine Flights
Special wine flights and food pairings, "wine of the day" specials and a delicious meal pairing for two.
Almendra Winery & Distillery, 9275 Midway Road, Durham. almendrawinery.com

Father's Day Weekend Wine Treat
Bring Dad in for his free wine tasting. Plus, buy one bottle of wine, get second half off Saturday and Sunday.
LaRocca Vineyards Tasting Room, 222 W. Second St. 800-808-9463. laroccavineyards.com

Flights, Pairings and Pours
Six different wine flights, plus daily by-the-glass wine selections of the higher-end offerings with the Coravin. Plus, locally sourced food specials.
Christian Michaels Ristorante, 192 E. Third St.

Sours at B Street
New York sours a buck off all week. Fri, 6/7, 11am.
B Street Public House, 117 Broadway St.

Spike the Bottle
Take 15 percent off all bottles of wine at Spike's.
Spike's Bottle Shop, 1270 E. First Ave.

Wine and Cheese
Free wine and cheese tastings Saturday and Sunday.
Bangor Ranch Vineyard & Winery, 5768 La Porte Road, 707-480-1429. bangor-ranch.com

Wine and Dine at Sicilian Cafe
Mention Wine Week for \$5 glasses of wine, paired with an entrée, every night: chardonnay with prawn scampi on Thursday, pinot noir with seafood on Friday, merlot with butternut squash mezzaluna on Saturday and

chardonnay with scallops on Sunday.
Sicilian Cafe, 1020 Main St.

Wine Bottles and Bubbly
Mention Wine Week for 40 percent off bottles of champagne and 30 percent off bottles of wine.
Grush, 201 Broadway St. chicocrush.com

THURSDAY, JUNE 13

Winery Tour • 1pm
Take a winemaker-led tour of the Almendra Winery & Distillery—then stay for lunch or enjoy some wine or spirits in the elegant tasting room. RSVP required at facebook.com/AlmendraWinery. Free.
Almendra, 9275 Midway Road, Durham.

Robert Biale Vineyards Wine and Dinner Pairing • 5pm
Join Red Tavern for a winemaker's dinner with Robert Biale Vineyards. Four-course meal featuring pan-seared duck breast and grilled prime ribeye, paired with amazing wines from Robert Biale. \$92.
Red Tavern, 1250 Esplanade. redtavern.com

Market Madness • 7pm
Belly Sutra belly dancing with special guest Kaira, plus \$8 bottles of Nebbiolo.
LaRocca Vineyards Tasting Room, 222 W. Second St. 800-808-9463. laroccavineyards.com

Patriotic Star Painting at Live Vine • 7pm
Head over to Live Vine Winery, which overlooks the Afterbay, for a Thursday evening of wine and sweet time with friends painting a patriotic star. Tickets are \$40 and include your first glass of wine, a 12-by-12 canvas, and step-by-step instruction.
Live Vine, 652 Luds Way, Oroville. livevinewines.com

FRIDAY, JUNE 14

\$5 Fun Friday • All day
All tastings \$5, half off the sparkling wine tasting.
LaRocca Vineyards Tasting Room, 222 W. Second St. 800-808-9463. laroccavineyards.com

SATURDAY, JUNE 15

Sangria and Nachos • Noon-5pm
Head out to the vineyard overlooking the Afterbay for housemade sangria, paired with a top-notch nacho bar—pulled pork, melted cheese, all the fixins, for \$7.
Live Vine Vineyard & Winery, 652 Luds Way, Oroville. 530-566-4259. livevinewinery.com

Nascere Wine Release • Noon-5pm
Nascere Vineyards releases its 2014 Super Tuscan red blend, paired with food, in the beautiful tasting room.
Nascere Vineyards, 3471 Durham-Dayton Highway, Durham. nascerevineyards.com

SUNDAY, JUNE 16

Farm to Cidery Dinner • 5pm
Special Wine Week dinner and cider pairing, featuring food from TurkeyTail Farms. Tickets for sale at brownpapertickets.com. \$45.
Lassen Traditional Cidery, 26 Bellarmine Court. lassencider.com