

CCCT play is genteel fun with local twist

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

"Life with Father," the current production by the Contra Costa Christian Theater (CCCT), is a trip back to the 1880s when father knew best but mother knew how to wrap him around her finger, when love had everything to do with beating hearts and compatible families and when children were happy with a game of tiddlywinks.

Bypassing a discussion of

which era was better, this classic comedy about an eccentric father, manipulative mother and four boisterous boys written by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse in 1939 is genteel fun for an afternoon or evening entertainment.

Discounting the missed cues and quibbles about son Clarence not changing his suit, price tags left on silver trays, overdone makeup and some long scene changes, the production was as smooth as a cast of 16 (some first timers and some as young as eight) can be.

Gary Mutz clearly enjoys his role as father, complete with period mustache and posturings as a fussy budget dictator. Playing his perfect foil is Beth Chastain as wife Vivie, who scruples at nothing to ensure the important things get done—like getting father baptized—while playing fast and loose with the household accounts.

Throw in a Greek frieze of hysterical maids nicely led by Benician Claire White, a minister with a mission (Don Williams), two officious doctors (Don Tubb and Larry

Barton) and some snake oil medicine and you get family entertainment for all ages. The love match between Clarence (Tyler Chastain) and Mary (Caitlin Kilcourse) is appropriately star crossed (was love ever that innocent?), Clarence's quest to get his own suit so he can be his own man nicely symbolic and the unspoken but unbreakable connection between father and mother reminiscent of a simpler time.

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Doug Ham designed this set for "Life with Father," a Victorian-era comedy running through June 30 from the Contra Costa Christian Theater group.

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The conversation between father and Clarence about women is worth the price of admission ("Women don't think, Clarence, they just get stirred up. Keep reason in the argument and don't let them turn it into whether you love them or not.")

Father's resistance about getting baptized is handled with modern insights into the tongue-in-cheek humor ("You have to use common sense to read the Bible.")

Benician Doug Ham's set is wonderfully Victorian and takes advantage of the entire thrust stage area to bring the production to the

audience. The staircase was particularly ingenious. The costumes by Cindy Sarmento were perfect as well as practical and condensing the play into the modern two acts instead of the original three was welcome.

CCCT has been a ministry of the Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church since 2000. Founder Reen Vogel had a vision to open the group to actors, crew and audi-

ences from all over the Bay Area regardless of religion to produce two plays a year based on family and faith, and has bigger plans yet. "Life with Father" is their first production in a secular space. It runs through June 30 at the air conditioned Village Theater in Danville: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and \$19; call 925-798-1300.

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