

New Village closes ninth season with Tennessee Williams classic 'Summer and Smoke'

By PATRICIA MORRIS BUCKLEY - For the North County Times | Posted: May 26, 2010 10:52 am



John DeCarlo and JoAnne Glover in New Village Arts' "Summer and Smoke," opening May 29 in Carlsbad. Photo courtesy of Daren Scott.

Kristianne Kurner has wanted to produce Tennessee Williams' rarely performed "Summer and Smoke" for a long time.

"I worked on the show as part of my design project in college," said Kurner, executive artistic director of New Village Arts Theatre in Carlsbad. "I love the strong female character of Alma. Williams said that Alma was his favorite female role he wrote, but Blanche (from 'Streetcar Named Desire') was his best. This is a play with all those great Tennessee Williams qualities ---- drama, beauty and tragedy."

"Summer and Smoke" tells the story of the minister's daughter Alma, a Mississippi girl filled with hope and ideals about love. She meets Dr. John Buchanan Jr., a young doctor next door who has a wild streak and an appetite for sensual pleasures. John tries to seduce Alma, but she resists, sure that a spiritual and lasting love can exist between them. However, that summer romance stirs something in her to the point that she begins to change her point of view.

"I thought it would be a good show to kick off the summer," said Kurner, who is directing the show. "It's an epic show ---- a tragedy in a wonderful Southern gothic way. It sweeps you up and takes you on a huge journey. I also like that it's so theatrical. It embraces all the theatrical elements to tell a story. And ultimately, it's a beautiful love story that's so romantic and sensual, yet tragic and funny."

The key to making the show work is finding the right actress for the role of Alma. Kurner didn't have to give the choice a second thought. She chose San Diego actress JoAnne Glover, a New Village ensemble member and Moxie Theatre co-founder.

"I knew the only person who could play it would be JoAnne," said Kurner. "She has this great vulnerability when she acts, yet it's mixed with incredible strength. That's really Alma. She's a sensitive soul with amazing strength to her."

Kurner's first choice to play John was Joshua Everett Johnson, but he now lives in New York. So she tapped New Village ensemble member John DeCarlo.

"He has such a compelling presence on the stage," she said. "And this is such a huge show with a cast of 14. We're using every inch of space and every lighting instrument we have. Plus we're having live music as well as recorded."

The cast also features two child actors, one of whom is Kurner's 11-year-old son, Jonah Gerke. He was a baby when the theater opened, and now the theater is about to embark on its 10th season ("Summer and Smoke" closes the company's ninth season).

"It's amazing to not only see the theater survive, but also thrive," she said of the theater's staying power. "When I think of all the people's lives we've been able to touch and all the stories we've been able to tell ---- to know it's become an important part of the community ---- I feel I have the best job in the world. I can't wait to see the next 20 years."

"Summer and Smoke"

When: Previews, 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday; opens Saturday and runs through June 20; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 3 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays

Where: New Village Arts, 2787 State St., Carlsbad

Tickets: \$20-\$40

Info: 760-433-3245

Web: www.NewVillageArts.org

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