

ALMOST, MAINE

In the town of Almost, Maine, miracles of love really do occur...

John Cariani's "Almost, Maine," directed by Daniel Ingram, is a collection of witty, loosely connected vignettes of love between the inhabitants of Almost, a small town in the state of Maine. In the town of Almost, love appears to be the miracle catalyst that makes or breaks these fragile relationships. More often than not, a sudden unexpected smooch climaxes the scene and the audience is left waiting to see whether this particular couple will be one of the lucky ones or one of the poor broken-hearted souls. The scenes all have a touch of magical whimsy: a lost shoe falling from the sky, miraculous recovery of neurological senses, somatic symptoms of "falling" in love and reuniting pieces of a broken heart. This allows for a playful, yet heartfelt take on the phenomenon of love.

Though all of the vignettes are enjoyments to view, some stand out as particularly laudable. In "Her Heart," Glory carries pieces of her heart in a bag to meet with her late love's spirit through the northern lights, but instead finds East, a repairman who strives to piece her heart back together. In "Sad and Glad," Jimmy's pain-ridden confrontation with ex-flame Sandrine is trumped by the coincidence of meeting a woman who shares the same name as his comically ruined tattoo "Villian." Although love is lost, serendipitous opportunity beckons. Steve, who can't feel pain, is miraculously able to feel an affectionate peck after his encounters with Marvalyn in "This Hurts." As one of the most memorable scenes, "They Fell" stands as an eccentric love story featuring Randy and Chad, who discuss nuggets of life around a campfire. The story later climaxes in an adorably corny display of their realizations that they are perfect for each other.

The production ran nearly perfectly. Subtle to the point of almost unnoticeable, stage arrangement was intriguing and really contributed to the play's overall impact. The locations of the scene sets were strategically placed to alternate quadrants of the stage, producing the sense of continuity appropriate for the play's short story nature. Though this element of the play attempted to provide for smooth transitions, its attempts were thwarted by the northern lights image projected onto the backdrop during scene changes that felt like interjections that ruined the atmosphere. Although they were appropriate in "Her Heart," where the northern lights actually seamlessly blended into the scene, it was disenchanting to see Macintosh-like screensaver "northern lights" images appear on the ceiling over what is supposedly an intimate indoor scene. Additionally, abrupt shut-offs of the music sequence that accompanied the projected image further disrupted our experience. A simple gradual fade-out during the music sequence would have easily fixed this problem. On the other hand, the music selection, from the mellow northern lights tune to the Michael Bublé tracks integrated during breaks helped contribute to the overall mood of the play.

Further preparation may have prevented the sound and technical difficulties experienced during certain scenes of the play. Though it was opening night, it is expected that all problems with sound quality should be surely dealt with before the play opens. Certain actors had to project their voices due to the absence of a working microphone. We were still able to hear the dialogue; however, we had front row seats, and those sitting further from the stage might have found it difficult to hear from a distance. Sound issues aside, the actors themselves were phenomenal. Though there were a few stumbled lines occasionally, the actors were able to recover quickly and power through their minor mistakes, using them to their character's advantage. Stuttered words enhanced the portrayal of feeling intense anger or a charming awkwardness. Overall, the entire cast demonstrated talent, dedication and hard work; some even showed professional potential.

The play was very well-received amongst the audience, as well. In moments of seriousness, such as the opening dialogue between Pete and Ginette, the audience was engrossed in the plot; the auditorium as silent as can be. Humorous shticks executed like that by Randy and Chad at the end of "They Fell" almost effortlessly yielded chuckles and giggles. Intimate moments like those exhibited between Rhonda and Dave generated "aw's," a telltale sign of a successful cathartic experience.

Overall, "Almost, Maine" did a fantastic job at executing sweet and somber stories and we hope to see more performances of its caliber from our Thespians.

MOOR graphics by ARELI ARELLANO

**MICHELLE PAULINO
KATHERINE ONG
Opinions Editors**

The MOOR 101 South Second Street, Alhambra, CA 91801

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moornewspaper@gmail.com