

THE KITE RUNNER Adapted by Matthew Spangler, based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini; directed by David Ira Goldstein. San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95113-2603. 408- 367- 7255 or www.sjrep.com. March 21-April 19, 2009

A STUNNING WORLD PREMIERE OF *THE KITE RUNNER* AT SAN JOSE REP

Thornton Wilder in *Our Town* is credited with honing the theatrical device of a Stage Manager to guide us through the lives of his characters. In his concept, he used a minimalist set with the Stage Manager an impartial observer allowing words and actions of the characters to carry the story line. In Matthew Spangler's stage adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's international bestseller *The Kite Runner*, the Stage Manager has a name, Amir. He is the protagonist and an integral key involved in the lives of the characters as he moves from observant narrator to taking part in the ongoing action spanning 30 years. Act one covers Kabul 1973-1976 and act two the Bay Area, Pakistan and Afghanistan 1981-2002. Being a refugee from worn torn Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini, who carved out a successful life as a medical doctor and author, knows of what he writes.



(I tor) Young Amir (**Craig Piaget**) and Hassan (**Lowell Abellon**) gleefully catch the last kite in San Jose Repertory Theatre's World Premiere of **The Kite Runner**. Photo: Kevin Berne.

It is a tale that begins with the friendship of two boys of divergent ethnic and religious backgrounds growing up in the same household in Kabul. Amir is the educated son of a Pashtun (Sunni Moslem) businessman living a grand house but ignored by his father. Hassan, lives on the grounds with his father who is the servant. They are Hazaras, with distinctive Asian features and considered lower caste. The bond between the two makes them inseparable. Kite fighting is a glorious sport and yearly battles are major events in Kubal. When a kite has been cut from its tether, the fallen kite becomes the property of him who retrieves it. Hassan is the best kite runner ever. When Amir wins the contest cutting the blue kite, Hassan runs to retrieve it as a trophy for Amir. In doing so, he is subjected to an unspeakable atrocity that is witnessed by a cowering Amir who does not come to his aid. Amir's guilt for his cowardice geodes him into accusing Hassan of theft leading to separation of the boys.

The guilt experienced by Amir remains with him forever and years later compels him to return to Kabul seeking redemption through a humanitarian act involving the orphaned son of Hassan. This is only the bare framework of this monumental stage production. Spangler has captured the heart of the novel being faithful to the storyline and social/political history. Man's inhumanity to man in the name of religion or diverse ethnicity is a theme running through the play. It is also a tale of love, hardship, bravery, hope and redemption. Director Goldstein paces the action brilliantly on Viki Smith's mood evoking multiple sets that move gracefully on the extended stage platform with a blue backdrop initially dotted with kites, later with freeway signs or simple clouds. Solar Nader composer and tabla player sits unobtrusively off stage right adding atmosphere with his authentic Afghan music.

Actors were recruited from across the country and supplemented with local favorites and all perform beautifully in major parts or as ensemble. Barzin Akhavan playing the adult Amir never leaves the stage giving a riveting performance worthy of a Tony Award. Craig Piaget as Young Amir and Lowell Abellon as Hassan form an acting team conveying true friendship. Thomas Fiscella as Baba radiates strength and authority and you will want to cheer when he confronts a threatening Russian soldier with powerful words to the effect "We must be more honorable in war." Demosthenes Chrysan as unbending, dictatorial General Taheri conveys power with minimal words and threatening body language. Adam Yazbeck as the sociopathic Assef plays the role with so much authority one can understand young Amir's reluctance to come to Hassan's aid. In this male dominated play that is a mirror Afghani culture, Rinabeth Apostol as Amir's love interest holds her own convincing us she is worthy of Amir.

There are pages one could write about why you must see this play. Be content with the simple fact, the audience rose as one for the standing ovation.

Running time 2 hours and 30 minutes with intermission.

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