



Cari Lynn Pace
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"The Last Romance" Soars with Hope

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Once in a great while, a beautifully crafted play sweeps you up in its arms and makes you wish it would never end. "The Last Romance" is that type of performance. The plot sounds so simple: two lonely seniors who have lost their spouses meet accidentally at a park. Can this be wondrous fate? Boyishly enthusiastic octogenarian Ralph (Will Marchetti) falls in love at first sight with septuagenarian Carol (Kitty Winn), who is coolly aloof and proper. The complications abound and the intrigue twists and turns with laughter that comes from the heart, and is not the least contrived. Can they make the leap to romance? Just when it might happen, Ralph's demanding and controlling sister Rose (Sharon Lockwood) manifests her disapproval of any dalliance lest it interfere with their orderly yet passionless world. Sadly, Ralph's sister cannot allow herself happiness as her heart is filled with bitterness at her own husband's abandonment long ago.

The couple's tentative friendship grows amidst flashbacks of when Ralph was young and auditioning as an opera singer. "The Last Romance" is enhanced by interlacing portions of various arias sung with superb power by Joshua Jeremiah. This talented tenor fills the auditorium with mesmerizing Italian lyrics, prompting the audience to spontaneously burst into applause.

All in all, Joe DePietro's loving script is a tribute to age, to youth, to taking risks, and to the chances that life offers. The motif of this sweet and tender glimpse of life questions which path might be taken; the choices provoke the emotions and intellect of the audience. How will this all come out? The heart soars with hope and the spirit holds on for the bumpy ride.

Kudos go to Casting Director Bruce Elsperger for his inspired selection of actors, and to Director Laird Williamson for bringing the subtleties and strength of these extraordinary characters to the stage. And what a lovely stage it is! The park bench, the falling leaves, the overgrown plantings and the revolving apartment interior are all the work of Michael Ganio.

"The Last Romance" truly is an evening's entertainment worth the drive to this first-rate venue. Playing now through November 6 at San Jose Repertory Theater at www.SJRep.com or by calling (408) 367-7255.