

Karamazov Brothers want your help for '4Play'

By John Orr

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It was 10:30 p.m., his time, and Paul Magid was waiting for his cod.

"I guess I ought to use the nice name for it," he said. "Baccalá alla Livornese."

Magid, who will be at San Jose Rep starting on Wednesday with The Flying Karamazov Brothers for a five-day run in the show "4Play," was in Italy (where he keeps a second home) to do "my other job. I direct a lot of shows over here."



Paul Magid as Dimitri in *The Flying Karamazov Brothers*!... (Courtesy of *The Flying Karamazov*)

True that. The graduate of Saratoga High who was one of the co-founders of The Flying Karamazov Brothers in 1972 (conceived in 1972, the website explains, born on April 23, 1973), was in Florence to direct some shows by Les Farfadais, a group of French performers.

"How to explain them "... Magid mused. "They're slightly punkish, very French performers and acrobats that use costumes they devise themselves. Hard to explain. An incredibly beautiful series of shows."

You can look for yourself at www.farfadais.com.

Magid, by the way, was speaking French, Italian and English at the table. He speaks all the Romance languages, he told me once, and I believe him.

But what of The Flying Karamazov Brothers, currently in New York, doing the very show, "4Play," that they will bring to San Jose Rep starting on Wednesday?

"Understudy," Magid said. Will he be back for the San Jose show? "Yes," Magid said, "or my mother will kill me."

Although Magid's homes are in New York and Italy, and he tours the world with The Flying Karamazov Brothers and with other groups he works with, his ties to the South Bay remain strong, with his mother in Los Gatos, a brother in Santa Cruz and a sister who is CFO of a solar-panel company in Cupertino.

His family and lots of other people can reasonably be expected to come to The Flying Karamazov Brothers shows, because they are big fun, with music, comedy, wild wit and, of course, juggling.

"'4Play' is basically, in many ways, like an old Karamazov show," Magid said, "going back to the roots, but it has all these things you wouldn't see in the old shows. It's been very successful in New York, because it's very fresh, and yet, has all this history in it. Great characters, tons of music, basically, it's a lot of fun."

Of course, Magid would say that. He wrote and directed "4Play."

But The New York Times liked it, too: "The Flying Karamazov Brothers are a low-tech triumph. Employing a simple collection of props and a large supply of talent, the troupe's current show, '4Play,' is as close to a sure thing as can be found onstage, 100 minutes of cleverness and comedy that go by in a flash."

The show has a lot of improvisational moments, Magid said – "We're free to leave the script at any time, then come back to it."

It made him laugh to say that.

And, of course, The Flying Karamazov Brothers will give the vaunted San Jose Taiko a run for its money, using cardboard boxes. My son saw that part of the show when he was 7, and cardboard boxes had short lives in my home for months after that.

"There's a lot of boxes in this show," Magid said. "You'll have to face that again."

And The Flying Karamazov Brothers need your help at the San Jose Rep shows, Magid pointed out, because "4Play" includes what they call "The Gamble."

In that routine, they ask for items from the audience – heavier than one ounce, no heavier than 10 pounds and no bigger than a breadbox.

The audience votes on items (an iPad was recently rejected in New York) and then Magid – the champion – must juggle the three selections. No live animals, please.

Juggled items have included an octopus, a bag full of dead frogs ("Frogs flying out everywhere," Magid said. "It was beautiful"), a chocolate cream pie, a Slinky, a floppy piece of pizza.

If Magid gets enough applause, fine.

If not, pow, cream pie in the kisser.

"Once we had a live lobster," Magid recalled. "That didn't end well. The audience turned on us."

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Stage preview

What: "4Play"

Who: The Flying Karamazov Brothers

Where: San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday-Nov. 13; 3 p.m. Nov. 13; 2 and 7 p.m. Nov. 14

Tickets: \$36-\$69; <http://tickets.sjrep.com> or 408-367-7255