

CAN WE TALK?

Dialogue can mean a conversation, words spoken by characters in a film, book or a play, or perhaps formal negotiations between opposing sides. Dialogue(s) is also the word used to collectively describe many writings of the Greek philosopher, Plato.

Old ideas can be timeless and true. Plato wrote his “Dialogues” as conversations about fundamental questions in life. He repeatedly emphasized that man was an animal endowed with logos (a Greek word meaning both speech and reason) who has an inescapable duty to use both in lifelong dialogue with the world.

Dialogue permeated 3rd century BCE Athenian life. This was particularly apparent in their theatre, the incubator which birthed modern theatre. In amphitheatres seating over 17,000 of Athens 150,000 population, Greek tragedies and comedies were presented as competitions which audience members judged. They weighed not only the dialogue spoken by the actors but the power, persuasiveness, realism and entertainment value of the plays ‘dialogue’ with the audience. The ancients knew that dialogue fosters a sense of connection and is a potential form of mutual education through sharing of ideas and active listening to another which benefits individuals and communities alike.

The highly talented artistic directors and production staffs bringing live theatre to Fairfield might consider taking a cue from history and offer some additional dialogue to their audiences in the form of one post performance discussion per theatrical run. Although new to Fairfield, this exists in theatres nationwide. Best of all, everybody wins.

No, I am not talking about snooty, artsy fartsy affairs wherein self impressed characters mutually gush or obscure, esoteric discussions of irrelevant minutia boring to the regular Joe predominate. I mean a dialogue that would be driven obviously by the type of production. Discussions might be light and cover the history of the play with interesting lessons learned or point out technical aspects or the challenge of writing, staging, producing or directing. Non judgmental patient facilitators would lead the discussion creating a safe space for all, listen well, juggle comments and ask the unasked questions while keeping it fun and maintaining order, focus and flow.

George Maguire, artistic director of Solano College Theatre, when commenting on his bringing Tim Robbins adaptation of Sister Helen Prejeans’ “Dead Man Walking” to Harbor Theatre said, "It's a hot button issue - end of story." Exactly and Bravo!

Many local past, present and planned productions use a stage of lights to emulate the stage of life through specific historical events or story lines grounded in weighty important issues. For example, “Greater Tuna”, presently showing at Missouri Street Theatre, is funny to be sure but it carries some powerful messages regarding the dark side of small mindedness, ignorance and bigotry. We all know that landscape is a lot bigger than mythical Greater Tuna, Texas. John Tracy’s play, “Chatterbox” was

more than the diary of Anne Frank from the perspective of Anne. "Miracle Worker" illuminated the blindness of the sighted and the vision of the blind as well as the enabling power of disability and the power of love. All are art imitating life

Light or heavy discussions are all valuable in that they bring the theatre and the audience closer into the very partnership they are always striving to make.

One theatre critic wrote," a Community Theater (gives) people opportunity to grow emotionally, spiritually and physically...and... not only offers enjoyment, but stimulates critical thinking, increases cultural understanding..., encourages personal and community creativity and pride, and contributes to lifelong learning in adults and the well rounded education and development of children while strengthening local economy".

Associated Students of Solano College and Solano College Theater are holding an public discussion/forum as part of their participation in the Dead Man Walking School Theater Project Thursday, Oct. 12, 2006, 12:30 – 1:30 pm in the Theater (1200) Bldg. Fairfield steps forward if post performance facilitated discussions become routine.

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