

Dragon Theatre's 'Birthday Party' worth celebrating - - San Mateo Daily Journal



James Kasyan

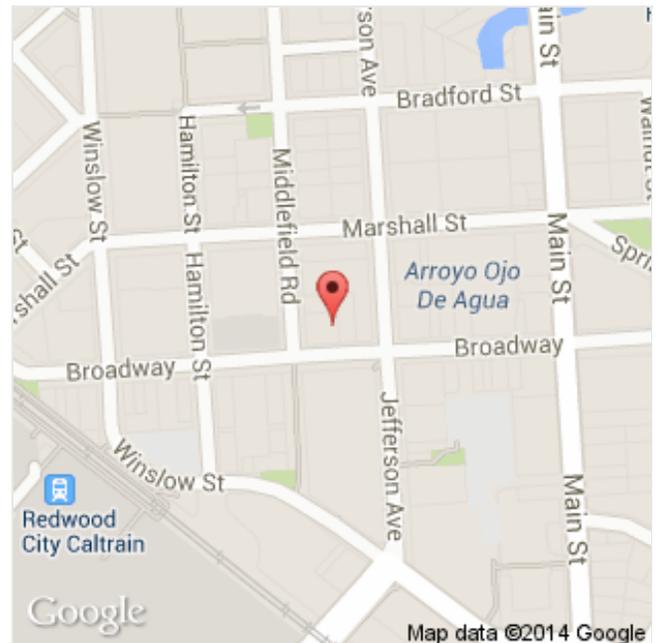
Avi Jacobson and Paul Stout star in 'The Birthday Party.'

Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party" is still confounding and entertaining audiences some 56 years after it was written. Dragon Theatre's production does nothing to shed more light on this three-act drama, yet it holds the audience spellbound.

Set in a boarding house on an English beach in the 1950s, the play starts quietly enough with the taciturn Petey (Tom Bleecker) coming home for breakfast with his morning paper and being served corn flakes by his ditzy but well-meaning wife, Meg (Celia Maurice).

Soon they're joined by their only boarder, the nasty, loutish Stanley (Paul Stout).

Later, two men in business suits, the smooth-talking Goldberg (Avi Jacobson) and the menacing McCann (Brian Levi), arrange for a room. When he hears about them, Stanley



becomes fearful.

That night, there's a birthday party for Stanley, who insists it's not his birthday. The celebrants are Meg, Goldberg, McCann and LuLu (Monica Ammerman), a sexy young neighbor. Petey is away at his weekly chess game.

With the alcohol flowing freely, the party evolves into an intense interrogation of Stanley by Goldberg and McCann. The next morning, he has been reduced to a catatonic state as the two men take him away.

That's the crux of the plot, but what is and isn't said is fascinating. What do Goldberg and McCann represent? What's their connection to Stanley? Why does Goldberg change details about his life? Those are just some of the questions that arise. More come from nuances in the characters' reactions and interactions.

Thanks to astute direction by Jenny Hollingworth and her well-chosen cast, there's always an element of tension with some relief from humor.

Running about two hours and 10 minutes with two 10-minute intermissions, this Dragon production is endlessly enjoyable and engrossing.

"The Birthday Party" will continue at Dragon Productions Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City, through June 15. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006 or visit www.dragonproductions.net.