



September 9, 2018

Cornerstone Theatre Arts

Goshen Music Hall

Interestingly, Cornerstone Theatre Arts of Goshen, presented Joe Sutton's slightly less than subtle two-act play *Orwell in America* to knowledgeable and interested audiences. Sutton's play, set in post-war America, 1948, is challenging and of interest on several different levels. To begin, it is ironically a bio-play depicting a slice of life that never happened. Further, and considering this was written for the stage, the traditional elements of drama are slight.

The play's action, what there is of it, consist of a fictitious speaking tour by George Orwell, famed author and avowed socialist of the best-selling novel "Animal Farm." He's accompanied by his publicist, Carlotta. "Animal Farm," once required reading in most high schools, is a stinging allegory of the Russian Revolution. As many will recall, the animals take over the farm, expelling the humans. The leaders are two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball representing Stalin and Trotsky, respectively. As the narrative develops, it details the overthrow of the czar and the establishment of communism.

The primary purpose of the tour is to promote book sales through a series of public appearances and talks. The publisher has assigned a publicist to keep Mr. Orwell, or his given name, Mr. Blair on task. His barely hidden agenda, quite frankly, includes detailing the benefits of socialism. In post-war America, a significant

portion of the general public considered socialism and communism to be synonymous, i.e., the international communist conspiracy or the Red Menace.

So, at this point, one might legitimately ask, What's going on? In other words, why produce this rather awkward play, *Orwell in America*, for the Goshen stage? Start at the evening's beginning and the introduction provided by the theatre's Artistic Director, Ken Tschan. He dutifully described the mission of the Cornerstone Theatre Arts of Goshen. A primary portion of that statement is to provide historical and pertinent social information for the general purpose of local enrichment. No doubt referencing Thomas Jefferson: "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people."

To amplify the significance of this mission, Director Bruce Gluckman selected this play, and as an experienced director he wisely cast his production with two seasoned and exceptionally talented actors. It was quite frankly sine qua non! For without the combined overpowering talents of Al Snider, as Orwell and Jess Beveridge as Carlotta, this play never leaves the gate!



Al Snider



Bruce Gluckman

In respect, Director, Bruce Gluckman is an important cog in the Cornerstone wheel. Based on the bibliography Mr. Gluckman displayed and shared, he can be considered, at the minimum, to be an Orwellian scholar. No doubt, a part of that decision making process was the recognition and notoriety George Orwell gained as an avowed socialist.

It is the talent contained in Al Snider's delivery of Orwell that cannot be over emphasized. His unfaltering ability to hold the stage and convey the emotional fervor an intellectual activist, a man committed in entirety to an ideal is a rewarding theatrical experience.



Jess Beveridge

In that vein, a part as challenging as Orwell is that of his dedicated publicist, Carlotta. In this role, Jess Beveridge is striking. She is most attractive and correctly able to unobtrusively step back and observe. Vocally, her delivery is crisp, articulate and rich as her manner adds credibility to this difficult, yet beautifully played role.

Adding to Ms. Beveridge's attractive stage presence is a arresting business suit. It was designed, with 1948 style accuracy, by Jenna Guarino. Although only two acts, there are scenes within those acts, detailed by clever lighting and sound design, expertly put in place by Jacqueline Dion. Two "Brava, Brava" appropriate here.



Jacqueline Dion

Adding to this writer's question of why this play? The question was put directly to Mr. Gluckman. One of the reasons was simply, "the election."

With specific reference to that election, one's attention is drawn to the phenomenon of Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and the attraction his position on democratic socialism held for the younger generation. Combine his ever expanding impact with the continual chaos and corruption of local, state, and federal government and they "Like a hell-broth boil and bubble."

The significance of Sutton's superbly delivered *Orwell in America* will resonate through the valley through September 23rd, playing at the Goshen Music Hall. Reservations are required. Call 845-294-4188 for reservations and additional information.