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Theater review: 'The Savannah Disputation' at the Old Globe

October 16, 2009 | 10:07 am



The subject may be heaven, but keep your eyes on the ground when you walk into Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation," an Old Globe production playing in the round at the San Diego Museum of Art's Copley Auditorium. Designer Deb O's set — a cozy Southern house — is perched on hundreds of books. And while the Good Book is at the core of this promising little comedy, the play gets very lost on the way to spiritual clarity.

Tart Southern Catholic spinster Mary (Nancy Robinette) and her sister, timid Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert), receive a visit from perky evangelical Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), who wants to know if they've been saved — from the pope. The insistent Melissa finds a crack in Margaret's religious armor and plans to win her as a convert. An outraged Mary calls in reinforcements in the form of parish priest

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Father Murphy (James Sutorius), setting the stage for a Scripture smack-down. As Mary puts it, “We want you to crush her.”

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So far, so funny, a kind of “Driving Miss Daisy” meets “Doubt.” Smith can effortlessly craft a laugh and likable characters, and the audience wants to watch how these women navigate the mystery of belief. Pretty soon Melissa is waving pamphlets about Catholic cannibalism while Mary wonders aloud how the young woman will get into heaven wearing 4-inch heels.

But this strong setup quickly dissipates as the playwright keeps changing focus. Is “Disputation” about two older women contemplating their death? (Numerous phone messages from a doctor’s office suggest that, for at least one of them, the issue of resurrection of the body is most relevant.) Is this the story of a power shift between a dominant and submissive sibling? The need to believe in something regardless of its logic? Is Smith just arguing that religion ruins people’s sex lives?

Even the first few scenes, in which characters move on and off the stage in awkward ways, signals that Smith and director Kim Rubinstein are still searching for the shape of the play.

The pleasures here are moment to moment. Robinette, part battleship, part adder, drives the play, and her withering Mary — way too capable for the life she’s chosen — is wicked fun. Lambert manages to give the diffident Margaret an appealing honesty; she just wants something to hold on to. Green finds Melissa’s desperation under the chipper facade, and Sutorius explicates biblical arcana with fluency. But none of them can quite make sense of Smith’s text, which strands them in theatrical purgatory.

— Charlotte Stoudt

“The Savannah Disputation.” James S. Copley Auditorium, the San Diego Museum of Art, 1363 Old Globe Way, San Diego. 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends Nov 1. \$29-\$62. Contact: (619) 234-5623 or www.oldglobe.org. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes.

Above: Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Nancy Robinette as Mary in "The Savannah Disputation." Photo by Craig Schwartz.

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LOS ANGELES TIMES

October 17, 2009

THEATER REVIEW

Battle for a soul loses its heart

The laughs are there, but 'Savannah' ultimately can't decide what it's really about.

CHARLOTTE STOUTT
REPORTING FROM SAN DIEGO

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The insistent Melissa finds a crack in Margaret's religious armor and plans to win her as a convert. An outraged Mary calls in reinforcements in the form of parish priest Father Murphy (James Sutorius), setting the stage for a Scripture smackdown. As Mary puts it, "We want you to crush her."

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CRAIG SCHWARTZ

GOD'S WORK: From left, Kimberly Parker Green, Mikel Sarah Lambert and Nancy Robinette argue about religion.

'The Savannah Disputation'

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Contact: (619) 234-5623 or www.oldglobe.org

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In this feisty Southern battle, dueling theologies duke it out

By [James Hebert](#)
Union-Tribune Staff Writer

2:00 a.m. October 3, 2009

DETAILS

"The Savannah Disputation"

The Old Globe Theatre

When: Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m. Through Nov. 1.

Where: 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

Tickets: \$29-\$62

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: theoldglobe.org

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It's not often that debate over the finer points of theology ends up quite so lively — or laugh-inspiring — as in Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation," the prickly little comedy whose big ideas get a full (and fully entertaining) hearing at the Old Globe Theatre.

No angels pirouetting on heads of pins here: In director Kim Rubinstein's zippy staging, it's more like four tag-team wrestlers dancing on a stained-glass canvas.

Rubinstein sets the no-prisoners tone straight off with a needle-drop of the Mountain Goats' "Heretic Pride," a song whose narrator sings of being happily hauled off to a date with a burning stake.

The setting for the play's own moment of reckoning is a cluttered house in Savannah, Ga., home to middle-aged sisters Mary (Nancy Robinette) and Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert).

The two are devout followers of (in their view) the One True Faith. Or, as meek Margaret tells a caller repeatedly, wielding the phrase like a crucifix waved in a vampire's face: "We are Catholics here."

This isn't just any caller, though: It's the zealously persistent Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), a dolled-up young missionary for the Evangelical Church of the Holy Spirit Alliance Church (a sect so pious it uses "church" twice).

The caustic, fire-breathing Mary has already driven Melissa off once, and while she's disgusted with her sister's comparative kindness to the plucky visitor, she admits with glee: "I hope she comes back so I can slam the door in her face again!"

Mary gets her wish, and more: Margaret, who appears to be wavering in her faith, has secretly agreed to let Melissa make a return visit. When the appointed day arrives (a Sunday, no less), Mary is outraged to find the chipper missionary in her living room again, spouting homilies like "Nice don't save you from hell fire" and explaining why Catholics don't believe in Jesus "in the right way."

What enrages Mary even more than Melissa's hold on her dithering sister is the fact the preaching is getting under her skin, too. When Melissa smugly proclaims that the Catholic Church is founded on a grammatical error (based on an esoteric analysis of how the Greek word "petra" is translated), Mary boots her from the house.

Then, in what Mary conceives as a coup de grace, she has Margaret use a ruse to set up an ambush: A dinner meeting with Melissa and the sisters' friend, Father Murphy (James Sutorius).

"We want you to crush her!" Mary hisses to the dumbfounded priest. What ends up happening, though, leaves pretty much everyone bruised and confused.

Rubinstein's ace cast plays this all out with a strong sense of rhythm, helped by the almost musical way the focus of Smith's writing flows from one character to another.

Robinette's funny and fierce performance is at the core of the show; she inhabits Mary with an almost scary delight in her own self-righteousness. The performance is often literally off-kilter — Robinette has a birdlike way of perching so that she leans into people as she speaks.

But as Melissa, Green (a recent USD grad and strong presence in last year's Globe Shakespeare festival) gives as good as she gets, winningly mixing sweet Southern manners with in-your-face, tough-gal flavah. She also gives touching glimpses into the character's vulnerable, lost-soul qualities.

Sutorius, memorable in the Globe staging of Arthur Miller's "The Price" earlier this year, shows a deft comic touch and great range as the dutiful, gently sardonic priest who steps up with surprising passion and power late in the play.

Lambert is a latecomer to this staging, after the unexpected departure of Robin Pearson Rose. Her character's passiveness leaves the actress with less of a role in the play's sometimes bitter disputations over such matters as what happens to the body during resurrection. But Lambert amply conveys Margaret's doubts as well as her worries over a mysterious phone message about medical tests — a plot point that adds a bit of heft to the snarky meditations on mortality.

The set by designer Deb O — a very lived-in parlor built on a platform atop voluminous stacks of books — is

a clever nod to the way the characters' worldviews rest in such a fragile way on their devotion to God's word as interpreted by mortals.

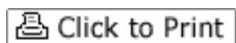
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Union-Tribune

[James Hebert](#) ;

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Kimberly Parker Green (Melissa) argues with Mikel Sarah Lambert (Margaret) and Nancy Robinette (Mary) in "The Savannah Disputation."



THEATER REVIEW

In this feisty Southern battle, dueling theologies duke it out

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

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James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com; blog: houseseats.uniontrib.com; Twitter: jimhebert

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

October 8, 2009

NIGHT & DAY

PLAYBILL

CRITIC'S CHOICE

'Things We Want' Director Lisa Berger and her cast show an intuitive feel for the darkly comic tone of Jonathan Marc Sherman's play about three struggling brothers and one open window. Their parents leaped through it five years apart; now the grown-up sons fight the bottle and each other. The play's winsome humor and sense of melancholy are reminiscent of a Wes Anderson movie (particularly "The Darjeeling Express"), and Berger's four performers bring it off in style. Another inspired pick by NVA chief Kristianne Kurner. (Jim Hebert) *New Village Arts Theatre, 2787 State St. Through Oct. 11. 760-433-3245, newvillagearts.org. \$25-\$30.*

'The Savannah Disputation' And verily, the Lord said, "Let's get ready to rumble." Evan Smith's theological comedy (now there's a scary phrase) pits two Catholic sisters against a zealous missionary and each other, not to mention a hapless priest they draw into the catfight. Kim Rubinstein directs with a deft balance of big laughs and big issues, and the cast gets deeply into the spirit of this spiritual free-for-all. (Hebert) *Copley Auditorium, 1450 El Prado, Balboa Park. Through Nov. 1. 619-232-7931, theoldglobe.org.*

'Creditors' Doug Wright's lacerating adaptation of the Strindberg original bristles with wit as it tells the story of a very tortured love triangle. The work of actors T. Ryder Smith, Omar Metwally and Kathryn Meisle shines like the edges of stilettos, and Wright directs the world premiere with a suitable sense of cunning and control. (Hebert) *La Jolla Playhouse, 2910 La Jolla Village Drive, La Jolla-UTC. Through Oct. 25. 858-550-1010, lajollaplayhouse.org. \$30-\$65.*

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

October 22, 2009

NIGHT & DAY



TALKIN' RELIGION: Kimberly Parker Green tries to get Mikel Sarah Lambert and Nancy Robinette to come to Jesus — her Jesus, that is — in “The Savannah Disputation” at the Old Globe.

Ken Falls Hard

*"I don't believe in God," he says.
"Join the club," says Tamyra.*

Ken Carpenter doesn't look like a dramatic lead. Soft-spoken, bespectacled, a slight humble stoop in the shoulders, the 57-year-old's a successful insurance salesman in Lincoln, Nebraska. He's been with one woman for the past 40 years, and on his own just once in the past 20. In the first few scenes of Tracy Letts's *Man From Nebraska*, Ken and wife

**THEATER
REVIEW**
JEFF SMITH

Nancy have such ingrained routines that lengthy pauses engulf the few words they utter. They've lived this way for decades and will, they're certain, forevermore. The opening scenes are so dull — deliberately — that neither we nor Ken see it coming.

Was it sudden, triggered by his mother's terminal illness, or building up for years? Ken doesn't say. But one night the gravest anxiety attack of all throws him to the floor: "I don't think...there's a God," he tells a stunned Nancy. Asked what he believes in, Ken can only reply, "I don't know."

Though Ken has spasms, the attack isn't physical. Nor is it the sexual yearning of a midlifer bemoaning lost youth. It wasn't even a "decision," he says. Flashes came on him. Now his head is "clear" and he "can't understand the stars." He hasn't just tumbled outside the box. The box has disappeared.

On the advice of his preacher, Ken takes his cri-

sis of faith to England, where he joins up with Tamyra and Harry, artists living, most likely, a permanent economic crisis in London's East End. ("I don't believe in God," he says. "Join the club," says Tamyra.) A kind of cultural exchange takes place: Ken, the emotionally blank have-everything (else), learns from the creative have-nothings.

Man From Nebraska joins a long line of lost-mooring dramas — David Mamet's *Edmond* among them. What separates it from most: Ken really falls hard, his whole existence gouged of meaning; and the playwright pens a subplot you could call *Woman From Nebraska*, since Letts includes wife Nancy's crisis. She too plunges like Icarus, and compared to Ken, her options are less than zilch.

Letts adds drama by creating leads barely able to articulate their pain (they're most eloquent when rendered speechless). For Cygnet Theatre, Brian Redfern's minimal set creates visual silences. Enhanced by Eric Lotze's excellent lighting, the stage can be dead blank or brimming with stars. George Ye's sounds and Jason Connors, combined with Jessica John's detailed costumes, demarcate two worlds: steel guitars and cotton prints for Nebraska; scat and jazz, florid reds and Bo-hunk mufti for England.

The supporting cast brims with sharp cameos, among them: Sandra Ellis-Troy's Cammie, the mother on life-support reduced to begging for food; Jeffrey Jones and Monique Gaffney as the tweaking Brit artistes; Amanda Sitton as purse-lipped daughter Ashley; and Linda Libby, a hoot as a pleasure-loving, modern Wife of Bath.

Michael Rich Sears takes a while to empty Ken convincingly. Gestures indicate but feel unconnected to actual hurt. Once inside, though, Sears expresses how it feels to lose one's sense of

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Melissa's a "Catholic missionary" — she tries to convert them — from the Evangelical Church of the Holy Spirit Alliance Church. She goes door-to-door in Savannah, Georgia, dropping off booklets and praying for lost souls. Melissa hits pay-dirt with Mar-



Monique Gaffney, Michael Rich Sears in *Man from Nebraska*

Man From Nebraska by Tracy Letts

Cygnet Theatre, 4040 Twiggs Street, Old Town

Directed by Francis Gercke; cast: Robin Christ, John DeCarlo, Sandra Ellis-Troy, Monique Gaffney, Jeffrey Jones, Linda Libby, Jack Misen, Michael Rich Sears, Amanda Sitton; scenic design, Brian Redfern; costumes, Jessica John; lighting, Eric Lotze; sound, George Ye; composer, Jason Connors

Playing through November 1; Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Sunday at 7:00 p.m. 619-337-1525.

The Savannah Disputation by Evan Smith

Old Globe Theatre, Simon Edison Centre for the Performing Arts, Balboa Park

Directed by Kim Rubinstein; cast: Nancy Robinette, Mikel Sarah Lambert, James Sutorius, Kimberly Parker Green; scenic design, Deb O; costumes, Judith Dolan; lighting, Alan Burrett; sound, Paul Peterson

Playing through November 1; Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Matinee Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. 619-234-5623.

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Melissa's chipper proselytizing offends Margaret a hundredfold, in part because Melissa's religion uses the word "church" twice in its name. Margaret's quick to shoo Melissa away. You have to, she says, otherwise missionaries like her keep coming back. They're like...cats.

Obviously Melissa's got her hands full and knows it: her cell phone plays the theme from *Mission Impossible*.

Evan Smith's *Savannah Disputation* creates the illusion of one. Melissa squares off with Margaret, her sister Mary, and Father Murphy, their priest. The play takes potshots at religious rigidities. Some strike home (the woman next to me uttered several knowing "mmm-hmms"). But the playwright takes his theme and characters only so far: all four face *Man From Nebraska*-sized crises. But Smith keeps the stakes comparatively small. He'd much rather entertain than enlighten or, perish the thought, offend. The 90-minute play is funny throughout. But it concludes with such a sweet sit-

com gift wrap that the characters return to their one-note ways with most scratches healed by the curtain.

The Old Globe cast received a standing ovation on opening night and deserved one. Throughout Nancy Robinette (beatific Mary), Mikel Sarah Lambert (feisty Margaret), James Sutorius (pensive Father Murphy), and Kimberly Parker Green (perky Melissa) tried to make a joke-driven play character-driven. Their spiky interplay made the ride enjoyable — at least while the ride lasted.

Deb O built her cluttered set on a familiar expression. Piles and piles of Bibles hold up the stage: the foursome literally testifies on stacks of Bibles. ■

STORIES OLD TOWN | THEATER REVIEWS

Ken Falls Hard

By Jeff Smith | Published Wednesday, Oct. 7, 2009

TEXT

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Deb O built her cluttered set on a familiar expression. Piles and piles of Bibles hold up the stage: the foursome literally testifies on stacks of Bibles.

Man From Nebraska by Tracy Letts**Cygnnet Theatre**, 4040 Twiggs Street, Old Town**Directed by Francis Gercke**; cast: Robin Christ, John DeCarlo, Sandra Ellis-Troy, Monique Gaffney, Jeffrey Jones, Linda Libby, Jack Missett, Michael Rich Sears, Amanda Sitton; scenic design, Brian Redfern; costumes, Jessica John; lighting, Eric Lotze; sound, George Ye; composer, Jason Connors**Playing through November 1**; Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Sunday at 7:00 p.m. 619-337-1525.**The Savannah Disputation** by Evan Smith**Old Globe Theatre**, Simon Edison Centre for the Performing Arts, Balboa Park**Directed by Kim Rubinstein**; cast: Nancy Robinette, Mikel Sarah Lambert, James Sutorius, Kimberly Parker Green; scenic design, Deb O; costumes, Judith Dolan; lighting, Alan Burrett; sound, Paul Peterson**Playing through November 1**; Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m. Matinee Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. 619-234-5623.[MORE JEFF SMITH](#) | [MORE OLD TOWN](#) | [MORE THEATER REVIEWS](#)
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SAN DIEGO READER

October 22, 2009

CALENDAR

THEATER LISTINGS

Theater listings and commentary are by Jeff Smith. Information is accurate according to material given us, but it is always wise to phone the theater for any last-minute changes and to inquire about ticket availability. Many theaters offer discounts to students, senior citizens, and the military. Ask at the box office.

The Andrews Brothers

Like *Forever Plaid*, *The Andrews Brothers* is a musical revue held together by a sketchy plot. When Laverne of the Andrews Sisters has chicken pox, the trio's quarantined. So three male stagehands, burning to strut their stuff, cross-dress as Patty, Laverne, and Maxene. The males entertain the troops with the tight, boogie-woogie harmonies that made the sisters famous — including "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," "Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar," and "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen." *Andrews Brothers* won't usurp *Hamlet's* pedestal in the realms of gold. It's about sheer forget-your-troubles entertainment. And the expert cast at Welk Resorts Theatre provides it. Bets Malone, Jeffrey Parsons, David Engel, and Johnny Bisom have worked together be-

fore, and it shows. Their voices blend beautifully. Even their shenanigans are flawless. Musical director Justin Gray added two trumpets to his band. And one of them — don't know which — gets to be the immortal "Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy (of Company B)."

Worth a try

WELK RESORT THEATRE, 8860 LAWRENCE WELK DR., ESCONDIDO. 888-802-7469. 1:45PM AND 8PM THURSDAYS, 1:45PM AND 8PM SATURDAYS, 1:45PM SUNDAYS, 1:45PM AND 8PM TUESDAYS, 1:45PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 8.

The Clean House

San Diego State Theatre presents Sarah Ruhl's quirky romantic comedy about the chaos that ensues when a cleaning lady becomes ill. SDSU'S EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, 5500 CAMPANILE DR., COLLEGE

The Creditors

In Doug Wright's expert adaptation of Strindberg's stormy *folie a trois*, love becomes mere economics, and mental cruelty, once unleashed, assumes a life of its own. Gustav's convinced his ex-wife, Tekla, is a soul-vampire. He gave, she took, and now he wants revenge. Tekla's second husband, Adolf, is an invalid (did she steal his energy?). To get back at Tekla, Gustav tries a demented form of autosuggestion on Adolf: implant epilepsy in the crumbling man. The ploy's a stretch, and even Gustav's surprised how well he succeeds. Under Doug Wright's direction, the 90-minute piece unfolds musically, in three movements. The play, even with his crisp translation, feels long-winded, but what the cast does beneath their lines fascinates. Every exchange is a contest of wills in which one character rises and the other sinks and tries to fight back. In a spellbinding performance, T. Ryder Smith gives Gustav a precise, patient surface (and a volcano within). Omar Metwally flips from assertion to grave hurt as Adolf, using the latter as his best control tactic. By the time she enters, you'd expect Kathryn Meisle's Tekla to swoop down on a broom, with fangs for teeth and snakes for hair. Instead, she's lively and vital — an Ibsenian heroine cast in a misogynist, Strindbergian drama.

Critic's pick

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE, 2910 LA JOLLA VILLAGE DR., UCSD. 858-550-1010. 8PM THURSDAY, 8PM FRIDAY, 2PM AND 8PM SATURDAY, 2PM AND 7PM SUNDAY, THROUGH OCTOBER 25.

Godspell

Lamb's Players presents this musical, by Stephen Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak, telling parables of Jesus as found in the gospel of Matthew. Robert Smyth directed.

619-437-0600.

HORTON GRAND THEATRE, 444 FOURTH AVE., DOWNTOWN. 7:30PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, 4PM SATURDAYS, 8PM SATURDAYS, 2PM SUNDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 22.

Joyful Noise

Lamb's Players presents Tom Slover's "historical backstage drama" about the creation of Handel's *Messiah*, which Lamb's produced, for an extended run, off-Broadway a decade ago. Robert and Deborah Smyth codirected.

LAMB'S PLAYERS THEATRE, 1142 ORANGE AVE., CORONADO. 619-437-0600. 7:30PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, 4PM AND 8PM SATURDAYS, 2PM SUNDAYS, 7:30PM TUESDAYS, 7:30PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 22.

The Lion King

The award-winning Julie Taymor musical makes a return visit to the Civic Theatre.

SAN DIEGO CIVIC THEATRE, 1100 THIRD AVE., DOWNTOWN. 619-570-1100. 7:30PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, 2PM AND 8PM SATURDAYS, 1PM AND 4:30PM SUNDAYS, 7PM TUESDAYS, 7PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 8.

Long Story Short

The San Diego Rep opens its new season with Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda's "audacious musical" about the 50-year relationship of Hope and Charles.

SAN DIEGO REPERTORY THEATRE, 79 HORTON PLAZA, DOWNTOWN. 619-544-1000. 8PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, 2PM AND 8PM SATURDAYS, 2PM AND 7PM SUNDAYS, 7PM TUESDAYS, 7PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 1.

Sammy

The Old Globe Theatre presents the world premiere of a musical biography of Sammy Davis Jr., book, music, and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse, directed by Keith Glover.

OLD GLOBE THEATRE, 1363 OLD GLOBE WAY, BALBOA PARK. 619-234-5623. 8PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, AND 8PM SATURDAYS, 2PM AND 7PM SUNDAYS, 7PM TUESDAYS, 7PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 8.

The Savannah Disputation

Evan Smith's comedy creates the illusion of a dispute. Young, Evangelical Melissa squares off with Margaret, her sister Mary, and their priest, Father Murphy. The play takes potshots at religious rigidities on both sides. Some strike home, but Evans-takes his themes and characters only so far. He'd much rather entertain than enlighten or, perish the thought offend and concludes with such a sweet sitcom wrap that everyone returns to their one-note ways with most scratches healed before curtain call. The Old Globe cast received a well-deserved standing ovation on opening night. Throughout Nancy Robinette (beatific Mary), Mikel Sarah Lambert (feisty Margaret), James Sutorious (pensive Murphy), and Kimberly Parker Green (perky Melissa) tried to make a 90-minute, joke-driven play character-driven. Their spiky interactions made the ride enjoyable, while the ride lasted. Deb O built her cluttered set on a familiar expression. Files of Good Books hold up the stage: the four M's literally testify on a stack of Bibles.

Worth a try

OLD GLOBE THEATRE, 1363 OLD GLOBE WAY, BALBOA PARK. 619-234-5623. 8PM THURSDAYS, 8PM FRIDAYS, 8PM SATURDAYS, 2PM AND 7PM SUNDAYS, 7PM TUESDAYS, 7PM WEDNESDAYS, THROUGH NOVEMBER 1.

Shut Up, Sweet Charlotte

Varla Jean Merman's gender-bending send-up of the Betty Davis movie comes to San Diego in a "larger than life" touring production, directed by Merman.

BIRCH NORTH PARK THEATRE, 2891 UNIVERSITY AVE., NORTH PARK. 619-239-8836. 2PM AND 8PM SATURDAY, 8PM THURSDAY, 8PM FRIDAY.

NORTH COUNTY TIMES

October 11, 2009

THEATER REVIEW

'Savannah' hides subtle message between laughs

By ANNE MARIE WELSH
For the North County Times

The laughs that pepper "Savannah Disputation" come with the regularity of a sitcom laugh track. Yet at its core, Evan Smith's recent comedy, now in a sly, entertaining production at the Old Globe, wrestles with the polarizing religiosity that polutes the national dialogue.

And just as there's a stealth theme about tolerance and intellectual humility lurking beneath the laughs, the Globe production, buoyantly directed by Kim Rubinstein, also has a secret weapon — actor Nancy Robinette. Her performance is a vivid tour de force as Mary, the self-styled "born mean" sister who wants to "crush" a perky evangelical stalking her Roman Catholic household like an unwanted cat.

Mary and Margaret are almost-elderly sisters living together in Savannah, Ga., long settled into a life in which combative Mary fights with every shopkeeper over pennies and meek Margaret perpetually wears an apron to keep house. Every Thursday, she makes dinner for their parish priest.

The sisters' familiar pattern is shattered when Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) opens the front door to admit the young blond proselytizer Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green). Her cheery manner disguises biblical absolutism. She views Catholicism as the Whore of Babylon and the sisters as misguided souls bound for eternal damnation. "Nice," she warns them, "doesn't get you into heaven."

Righteous Mary throws



Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa, left, Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Nancy Robinette as Mary in the Old Globe's West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation," now playing in the Globe's Copley auditorium at the San Diego Museum of Art. Courtesy photo

"THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION"

WHERE The Old Globe at the James S. Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego

WHEN 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; through Nov. 1

TICKETS \$29-\$59

INFO 619-234-5623 or oldglobe.org

the girl out, but Margaret, timid in her faith and keenly aware of her mortality, is not so sure. Shaken, she invites the girl back. Predictably,

Melissa's absurdly literal and rigid didacticism drives a wedge between the sisters.

"Your whole church is founded on a grammatical error," Green's smiling Melissa tells them, elucidating a favorite evangelical misreading of a Greek gospel.

Mary is soon comically reduced to defending the infallibility of the Pope's pronouncements by saying, "If you never hear it in the first place, you don't have to believe it!" She knows she's losing the argument, so, without telling him what she's up to, she brings in the big gun, her

one pal at Blessed Sacrament Church, Father Murphy.

Robinette conveys Mary's scheming with such sadistic delight that the character sheds 10 years before the priest gets there. In contrast, Lambert's subtly panicked Margaret exudes innocence and expectation verging on terror. Conflict unnerves her. Twice it sends her fleeing to her room.

James Sutorius scores again at the Globe as Father Murphy, rounding out this expert cast of four. Dressed (by

See 'Savannah', Page F4

'Savannah'

Continued from Page F3

designer Judith Dolan) in nondescript sport clothes and a beige jacket, vaguely hunched and mild in his manners, Sutorius creates a self-erasing priest, as bland as the banana-pudding-with-vanilla wafers he eats when the living room disputation goes too far.

Why Mary saw this milque-toast as a militant defender of her faith remains a mystery until just before the end. Then, the playwright has Father Murphy switch gears so abruptly, he's almost unrecognizable. Once a theologian and scholar, he shows Melissa the error of her ways, yet he also makes surprisingly rigid

demands of his own upon the newly heretical Mary. hilariously, she has excommunicated herself because he's told her she must believe in the resurrection of the body, a tenet of her faith she finds ridiculous, and downright repulsive. Post-casket, where will she shower?

Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, for this is a boisterous mainstream comedy, but Smith does make excellent use of that cornerstone of Catholic (also "Christian") doctrine about "the resurrection of the body." Whether by artistic design or poetic happenstance, the play's humor, debates and out-and-out fights unveil the characters' vulnerabilities, *vis a vis* their bodies, this side of the grave.

Sex has brought neither joy nor solace to any of them. The celibate priest takes comfort in being a eunuch by choice. Mary's rage comes partly from being dumped by her husband — and for a Baptist! Margaret is a spinster who seems to have missed her one chance with a loving mate. And the evangelical is a man-hunter, unlucky in love, and destined, perhaps, to return to the Lancome counter, not her missionary "vocation."

Very few available men have joined Melissa's denomination, the Evangelical Church of the Holy Spirit Alliance Church. Could religion be the opiate of the sexually unfulfilled?

As local audiences learned when Smith's rhyming satire of Victorian marriage ("The

Uneasy Chair") was smartly produced at North Coast Repertory Theatre, this playwright knows how to write crackling dialogue, craft smart jokes and construct a scene and a play. "Savannah Disputation" contains no thematic breakthroughs or theatrical innovations. And though it may not have quite the same appeal for Buddhists, Jews or Muslims as for recovering Catholics like me, Rubinstein's excellent Globe production engages heart and mind through laughter, start to finish.

Home / Entertainment / Arts-and-theatre / Theatre

THEATER REVIEW: Sly 'Savannah' hides as subtle message in between its laughs

- Story
- Discussion

ANNE MARIE WELSH - For the North County Times | Posted: Wednesday, October 7, 2009 9:20 am
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Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa, Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Nancy Robinette as Mary in the West Coast Premiere of Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation," at The Old Globe, Sept. 26 - Nov. 1, 2009.

The laughs that pepper "Savannah Disputation" come with the regularity of a sitcom laugh track. Yet at its core, Evan Smith's recent comedy, now in a sly, entertaining production at the Old Globe, wrestles with the polarizing religiosity that pollutes the national dialogue.

And just as there's a stealth theme about tolerance and intellectual humility lurking beneath the laughs, the Globe production, buoyantly directed by Kim Rubinstein, also has a secret weapon ---- actor Nancy Robinette. Her performance is a vivid tour de force as Mary, the self-styled "born mean" sister who wants to "crush" a perky evangelical stalking her Roman Catholic household like an unwanted cat.

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The sisters' familiar pattern is shattered when Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) opens the front door to admit the young blond proselytizer Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green). Her cheery manner disguises biblical absolutism. She views Catholicism as the Whore of Babylon and the sisters as misguided souls bound for eternal damnation. "Nice," she warns them, "doesn't get you into heaven."

Righteous Mary throws the girl out, but Margaret, timid in her faith and keenly aware of her mortality, is not so sure. Shaken, she invites the girl back. Predictably, Melissa's absurdly literal and rigid didacticism drives a wedge between the sisters.

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"The Savannah Disputation"

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; through Nov. 1

Where: The Old Globe at the James S. Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$29-\$59

Info: 619-234-5623

Web: oldglobe.org

Posted in Theatre on *Wednesday, October 7, 2009 9:20 am* | Tags: Entertainment Preview, Nct, Theater

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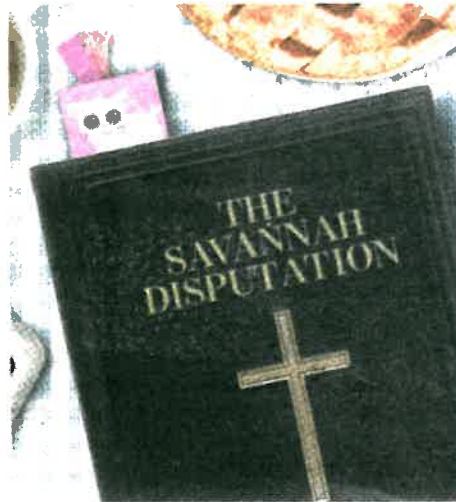
THE RAGE

October 2009

The Savannah Disruption

Written by Evan Smith and Directed by Kim Rubinstein this comedy's tagline reads, "God works in hilarious ways". Zoom in on a good-natured and sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, spirited Mary. They are Catholics who receive an unexpected visitor. We'll leave the details vague, but the visit causes Margaret's faith to waver. Mary hatches a plan to bring Margaret back into the light by enlisting the aid of their unsuspecting parish priest and throwing a truly devilish dinner party. Played by a cast of four, The Old Globe show is a "comedy you can believe in."

The Savannah Disruption plays now through November 1 at The Old Globe. For tickets call 619.234.623 or go to oldglobe.org.



SAN DIEGO

Regional Reviews by Bill Eadie

The Savannah Disputation

Also see Bill's review of [Sammy](#)

The Savannah Disputation, Evan Smith's comedy which had its debut at Chicago's Writers' Theatre in 2007, is a very funny play about religion. Usually, religion is not a particularly funny topic, unless it is being mocked, but Smith neatly manages to uncork a good many jokes about religious debates while still respecting each side's viewpoint. And the Old Globe is giving Mr. Smith's play a sparkling West Coast premiere production featuring one superior performance as well as three excellent ones.

The action takes place in the Savannah, Georgia, home of Mary and Margaret, two sisters who consider themselves to be devout Catholics. Mary is a fixture at mass, but she sits by herself, openly resenting those who sit around her, and then claims that the only friend she has in the parish is Father Murphy, one of the priests. Margaret is meeker and easily taken in, but she seems not to attend mass quite so often, perhaps not at all. Their house is filled with religious statuary and icons (and lots of other things—the sisters seem to be incapable of throwing anything away), and Father Murphy is in the habit of having dinner with them each Thursday evening.



Nancy Robinette

Into the sisters' lives comes Melissa, an attractive young woman offering religious tracts. Taking her for a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mary shoos her away. But, Melissa returns when only Margaret is at home, and Margaret lets her in. Melissa and Margaret talk about Catholic faith and dogma, and Margaret becomes confused about her faith as a result of Melissa's claims. It seems that Melissa is not a Jehovah's Witness after all but rather a member of an evangelical church that believes that Catholics are not Christian and need to be converted.

Mary is infuriated that Margaret has allowed herself to be led into doubt, but she is unable to convince Margaret to ignore Melissa's claims. So, Mary plots to have Melissa visit next on the same day that Father Murphy is coming to dinner. When Melissa arrives only to find that she has both Mary and Father Murphy to contend with, both she and Father Murphy are unhappy about having been led into a confrontation that neither had sought.

Eventually, however, Mr. Smith gives both sides a chance to explain their claims, to verify which are correct and which are in dispute, and to consider for themselves the implications of the religious teachings to which each side is attached. Out of this process comes some surprisingly honest revelations.

Mr. Smith's play isn't perfect by any means. In particular, it has a tendency to introduce plot

points and then leave them hanging or unresolved. But the play's characters are refreshingly real and not mere representations of their points of view. The psychological basis of their revelations to each other seems exceptionally secure.

Did I mention that the play is very funny without disrespecting either side's religious beliefs?

Director Kim Rubinstein's production captures both the humor and the humanity of the text. Deb O's scenic design shows the clutter of the sisters' home (and lives) without impeding sightlines in the Old Globe's temporary arena space. Judith Dolan's costumes are character studies in themselves. Alan Burrett provides a subtly effective lighting design, and Paul Peterson's sound design ranges from hit-you-over-the-head music to doorbells and answering machine messages that sound just right.

The role of Mary is the lynchpin in the cast, and though the part was not written for Nancy Robinette, it seems as though it had been in her hands. Though little known to San Diego audiences, Ms. Robinette is a stalwart of the Washington, DC, theatre scene. She's in her element here, and her textual acuity and comic timing are masterful. She gives, in short, a perfectly realized performance.

Mikel Sarah Lambert stepped in during rehearsals to replace the indisposed Robin Pearson Rose. On opening night she seemed a bit tentative at the beginning of the show, and Ms. Robinette appeared to be pulling her on. But Ms. Lambert's character gained confidence and depth as the play progressed and her portrayal was strong when strength was most needed.

As Melissa, Kimberly Parker Green effectively portrays the fervor and commitment of her character while side-stepping the stereotype of the smiling but essentially insincere evangelical that is so often presented. Ms. Green's character spends a good deal of the play listening to others, but her listening is often eloquent.

James Sutorius has to navigate Father Murphy's conflicted feelings of anger for being dragged into this debate, his concern for the beliefs (or lack of same) of his parishioners, and his own doubts about Catholic dogma. Mr. Sutorius' performance seems too detached when these conflicts first began to present themselves, but connects once the characters' revelations began to emerge.

The Old Globe's production of *The Savannah Disputation* is one that will be enjoyed by religious and non-religious alike and is likely give those who are exposed to religious debates plenty to think about as they consider their own spiritual condition.

The Savannah Disputation, September 26 – November 1 at the Old Globe Arena Stage at the James S. Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art (in Balboa Park, adjacent to the Old Globe campus). Tickets (\$29-\$62) are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, or online at [The Old Globe's website](#).

The Old Globe presents *The Savannah Disputation* by Evan Smith. Directed by Kim Rubinstein with scenic design by Deb O, costume design by Judith Dolan, lighting design by Alan Burrett, and sound design by Paul Peterson. Anjee Nero is the stage manager. With Nancy Robinette, Mike Sarah Lambert, James Sutorius, and Kimberly Parker Green.

Photo: Craig Schwartz

By Charlene Baldrige

Not a question of faith

THE SHOW: The West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*, directed by **Kim Rubinstein** at the Globe's Arena Stage at San Diego Museum of Art

THE STORY: It's not a question of faith: all the characters—even the one outside the fold—are believers. They just believe differently. Margaret lives with Mary in a cluttered but comfortable home in present-day Savannah. The never-married Margaret's faith is pure and simple, unquestioned, unquestioning. The divorced Mary is overtly more devout, yet angry. In the play's opening scene she tries to justify her uncharitable feelings towards the indigents brought to mass each day and whom she is expected to touch during the sign of the peace. When she finds that Margaret has admitted a young evangelical missionary named Melissa into their home, Mary is furious, declaring that people are like cats, and once you're nice to them, they keep coming back.

Once a week Father Murphy, the parish priest, invites himself for dinner. He brings videotapes and they watch classic films. Mary hatches a plan to invite Melissa, who has actually shaken Margaret's entrenched beliefs with her religious tracts and Bible quoting, to come back on Thursday night. Melissa arrives, meets Father Murphy and asks if he is Catholic too. Without a collar, priests look like any other men. Once this cat is out of the bag, Mary declares, "We want you to crush her." Unaware that her foe is a formidable theologian, missionary-in-training Melissa is armed with the usual stuff—all Roman Catholics are idol worshippers, etc.—proceeds with the disputation, hoping to bring all to Jesus and salvation.

It's a wild and wooly 90 minutes, appealing to anyone familiar with the territory. Without taking sides, Smith has written an intelligent, funny and clever play that calls each individual's motivations and faith into question. The beauty of the work is that he doesn't take sides. Mousy Margaret, who never took a stand in her life, finally does so; and except for Father Murphy's agonized expression as he makes his exit, one might think that peace was made and peace is possible.

THE PERFORMERS are deftly cast and impeccably directed by Rubinstein, who teaches at UCSD. **Mikel Sarah Lambert** (remember her from the Globes *Hay Fever*?) is utterly appealing as the spinster Margaret, holdover from generations where one always found unmarried sisters and brothers living with each other or their siblings. Globe debutante and classical actor **Nancy Robinette** manages to play the thin-lipped, man-hating Mary without making her too distasteful. Her comeuppance over the resurrection of the body is hysterical. **Kimberly Parker Green**, a stunning Helena in last season's *All's Well that Ends Well*, is versatile indeed and certainly holds her own in this company of more seasoned actors. **James Sutorius**, veteran of the Globe's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Price* as well as the Playhouse and Broadway productions of *The Farnsworth Invention*, never ceases to amaze with his no-two-are-alike character portrayals.

THE PRODUCTION: The Globe has made good use of the Copley Auditorium during the razing of the former Cassius Carter Centre Stage, but I am not sorry to see it go. As much fun as it is to look down on the players in a vast expanse of scenery, it is a difficult playing space due to its sheer size. Scenic designer Deb O seems to have raided the entire realm of Globe-at-Copley antique furniture to create yet another fascinating "jumble" set that's quite homey. Judith Dolan's costumes take one back to the spinster aunts of yesteryear, those with a bit of flair, and those who stayed in the kitchen making banana pudding. Alan Burrett's lighting design and Paul Peterson's sound are indeed assets.

THE LOCATION: 7 pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays; 8 pm Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 pm Saturdays and Sundays **through November 1**, Old Globe Arena Stage at Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, \$29-\$62, www.theoldglobe.org or (619) 23-GLOBE.

BOTTOM LINE: Best Bet

THEATER

Of warfare, religious and psychological

by Jean Lowerison

'The Savannah Disputation'

Theological discussions about nit-picky little points of biblical translation are best left to theologians and academics, but playwright Evan Smith puts them in the mouths of two elderly sisters, a pretty young fundamentalist and a tired priest in *The Savannah Disputation*.

The Old Globe Theatre presents Evan Smith's theological comedy (if that's quite the term) through Sunday, Nov. 1 at the Copley Auditorium of the San Diego Museum of Art. Kim Rubinstein directs.

Mary (Nancy Robinette) and her elder sister Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) share a cluttered house in Savannah. They are Catholics (with saint statues and a huge Bible in view) and comfortable in their faith, imperfectly understood though it may be.

Fundamentalist Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), whose own indoctrination has included assertions that Catholics are going to hell and yoga is "satanic," provides the conflict when she appears at the door with the opening gambit, "Are you saved?"

Mary, sharp of mind and tongue, does not suffer fools gladly, and her impatience makes her quick to use the label. She orders Melissa off the

property with the promise to call the police the next time she appears.

But (you saw this coming, right?) Margaret, rounder of person and personality, and more tolerant of ideas not her own, lets Melissa in the back door and even takes a pamphlet.

The infuriated Mary, intent on "crushing" the young fanatic (what a Christian endeavor), sets up a second meeting which will include unsuspecting local parish priest Father Murphy (James Sutorius), who arrives expecting nothing more than his usual Thursday dinner with the sisters.

Smith has a talent for creating watchable characters, but may well alienate some audience members with the sitcom-like treatment of them and of the topic. Questions such as which "rock" Jesus built his church on (the answer to which depends on whether he said anything at all about it, and if so, which translation got it right) are more likely to put listeners to sleep than to engage them. We had more interesting discussions in the college dorm, where the question was whether there is a God, and whether it matters.

These are stock characters all, though Smith makes them fun to watch, especially with this fine cast. Robinette's combative Mary, operat-

ing with verbal guns blazing, makes us feel sorry for Lambert's conciliatory Margaret, bewildered by her sister's mean streak, at least until Mary finally lets her guard down enough to show us the hurt beneath the anger. Margaret ("the nice one") just wants her question answered: Is Melissa right?

Sutorius' Father Murphy is a quiet drunk with the intellectual heft for the fight but not the heart to destroy poor Melissa. He seems unaware that Mary has had a thing for him for years.

Green's Melissa (she of the "Mission: Impossible" cell phone ringtone) has all the maddening pre-programmed answers except the one that matters most to her: where will she find a husband?

Adams has a way with entertaining dialogue, and there are many laughs in this script. What it lacks is originality and depth. Adams' point seems to be that no one has all the answers, but this hardly seems to need restatement.

The Savannah Disputation plays through Sunday, Nov. 1, at the Old Globe Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art. Shows Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinee Saturday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.

'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'

George and Martha are back with their harrowing brand of verbal humiliation and psychological warfare and that silly little song about Virginia Woolf.

Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* plays through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre, directed by Shana Wride.

In a small New England town, history professor George (Dale Morris) and his wife Martha (Glynn Bedington) return home after a faculty party given by Martha's father, the university president.

It's 2 a.m., and George is settling happily into a drink when Martha announces she's invited new biology prof Nick (Tyler Herdklotz) and his mousy wife Honey (Kelly Iverson) over for a nightcap. Little do they know what's in store.

George and Martha have a toxic marriage characterized by Martha's disdain for George's lack of ambition and George's hatred for the humiliation she regularly heaps on him. But they are bound for life in a sick relationship that unnerves us but works, in some strange way, for them.



Tyler Herdklotz and Kelly Iverson star in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre

Over the course of a liquored-up evening, psyches will be laid bare, painful secrets revealed and mocked, even a longstanding unspoken fantasy between George and Martha will be exposed.

It's a disturbing but exhilarating evening of theater when it's done right, and Compass does it justice, starting with Adam Lindsay's terrific set design and period props.

Bedington's Martha is a bit of a snarling tiger, ready to leap on anything weaker than she – and that includes everyone in this room. But for all the viciousness and anger, her vulnerabilities are palpable. She desperately wants something she knows she'll never have, and we can feel it.

Morris' George has managed to survive Martha somehow, but it seems he's shrunk a little in stature with every furious outburst. But watch out – this seeming puppy dog still has teeth that can rip psychological flesh.

Herdklotz does a splendid job with Nick, playing him a bit stronger than is usually the case. He has to walk a tightrope, trying to maintain his dignity while not insulting the president's daughter.

Iverson is excellent in the badly underwritten part of Honey. She is the innocent and diffident little wifey, seriously outclassed in this pool of sharks.

Bravo, Compass, for doing justice to this American classic.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? plays through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre. Shows Thursday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-688-9210 or visit www.CompassTheatre.com.



(l-r) Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa in the West Coast Premiere of Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*, at The Old Globe, through Sunday, Nov. 1.

'Creditors'

Creditors is a perverse little three-person piece about toxic love relationships, the urge to destroy and the need to possess. It was written in 1888, the same year as his much more famous *Miss Julie*; in fact, they were originally presented on a double bill.

Doug Wright, whose brilliant script catapulted his *I Am My Own Wife* from a workshop production at La Jolla Playhouse to two Tonys and a Pulitzer Prize, returns to direct his adaptation of the Strindberg one-act, which plays through Sunday, Oct. 25, at the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre.

Adolf (Omar Metwally), a painter and sensitive soul, had hoped for a marriage of soulmates with Tekla (Kathryn Meisle), and is disappointed that she does not find him sufficient, but evidences a puzzling need to socialize outside the marriage. She is, in fact, downright flirtatious.

Gustav (T. Ryder Smith) is the brains of the trio; the sort who likes to analyze and dissect. In his scene with Adolf, Gustav uses his superior intellect not only to undermine Adolf's already shaky confidence in Tekla's fidelity, but also to convince his easy target that he is a prime candidate for epilepsy.

And what of Tekla? She is an attractive and sociable woman who could be read as just a girl who wants to have fun, or as the vampire Gustav suggests she is. In either case, she seems undeterred by the effect her actions have on others.

The play is set in one black-and-white room of a spa, with enormous glassed doors behind which distracting light can be seen, presumably sunlight bouncing off a pool.

Wright's adaptation updates the language and keeps Gustav's identity out of the program in the attempt to create some mystery. It's only partially successful; the natural tendency to wonder why this man is getting so personal with a perfect stranger creates another unnecessary distraction.

Still, Wright's top-notch cast makes the most of this static play. Smith's suave coolness keeps Metwally's Adolf on the edge of breakdown; Meisle may be an early feminist in her failure to understand what these men are complaining about.

Strindberg wasn't a good fit for late 19th-century Sweden. He was a misogynist (three failed marriages probably didn't help); wrote plays deemed so radical that he had to publish them elsewhere; was tried for (and acquitted of) blasphemy; dabbled in alchemy (he thought he could make gold) and the occult; suffered paranoia and near madness, and died alone.

But he is considered Sweden's greatest writer and his lasting global influence on poetry and theater is

undeniable.

Creditors is a short play; still, today's audiences are likely to see it as talky. But it's interesting as psychological warfare (albeit it one-sided), and a perfect complement for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

Creditors plays through Sunday, Oct. 25, at La Jolla Playhouse's Potiker Theatre. Shows Tuesday and Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 7 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 858 550-1010 or visit www.lajollaplayhouse.org. ●



Omar Metwally (left) as Adolf and T. Ryder Smith as Gustav in La Jolla Playhouse's world-premiere production of *Creditors*, adapted and directed by Doug Wright from the play by August Strindberg, playing in the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre through Sunday, Oct. 25.

San Diego Arts

"The Savannah Disputation" at the Old Globe Theatre

About your soul...

By Welton Jones

Posted on Fri, Oct 2nd, 2009

Last updated Fri, Oct 2nd, 2009

The four little people in Evan Smith's play "The Savannah Disputation" are scarcely qualified to debate and the universe, but they certainly try their best.

And you really have to love them for it, all four of them.

Set in coastal Georgia, for no specified reason, the play (now on the Old Globe's temporary arena stage of Art) is a sloppy scuffle over theological minutiae that has baffled earnest experts for eons. And the result is: No decision. Except in people's own hearts.

A couple of nice Catholic girls, spinsters growing old together, lead lives challenged only by the increase of the younger and more assertive of the two. Where Margaret is widely beloved as a sweet and gentle soul, all the fools in the world, is increasingly seen as plain mean.

She justifies her attitude as that of a perfectionist but the world sees only a sorehead. And she IS a trifle uninterested in understanding.

So, if she had had a dog, it would have been sickened on that pert evangelist girl who shows up at the door and asking after everybody's state of grace.

Margaret secretly invites the girl back because she really is beginning to be worried about Mary not joining that is. And when Mary interrupts the visit with Melissa – who looks far more like a sorority rush captain – exchanges ring with earnest fervor. Because Melissa is loaded for unbelievers. (She even quit yoga and Satanism for worship positions in ancient Aztec rituals or something.)

Shaken but unbroken, Mary fights back. She has Margaret, increasingly wrought, invite Melissa for dinner and herself calls Father Murphy and invites him, too. But she decides not to tell either guest of the planned dinner.

Poor Father Murphy, who expected nothing more stimulating than the banana pudding, seems instead to deliver broadsides: Indulgences! The "throne" of St. Peter. Purgatory! The grammatical error that begat papism.

Mary, whose practical Catholicism runs to "If you don't hear the Pope say it, you don't have to do it!", folds. So finally he pulls himself together and counter-attacks with the Book of Leviticus: "Does a hare

Actually, when warmed up, he leads the discussion with practiced, overwhelming rationality, comparing different editions to banish the concept of gospel infallibility while bringing the bad news to Mary and



Mikel Sarah Lambert (left) and Kimberly Parker Green in "The Savannah Disputation." (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

The Comic Coming

THE SHOW: The Savannah Disputation, a West Coast premiere, at the Old Globe

Theological arguments are a tough sell — especially in a comedy. But Evan Smith's 2007 play bypasses mere comedy and goes straight into sitcom. All that's missing is the laugh-track. This insubstantial squabble on religious grounds pits the evangelicals against the Catholics, a distinction that seems arcane to those outside the faith, though it might be deadly serious to those within. Chapter and verse are indeed quoted, and there's even a little Latin and Greek thrown in, but this effort feels decidedly like "The Golden Girls Religious Redux."

Two Catholic spinsters, Mary and Margaret, go about their lives with stacks of spiritual tomes surrounding them (clever set design by Deb O), and church very much a part of their everyday existence. Then the doorbell rings (there's also the enigmatic phone message on the answering machine, imploring someone - we never learn which sister - to come in and see the doctor soon about some test results. Talk about your McGuffins). Standing at the door is a perky blonde evangelist missionary, who's hellbent on saving their souls, and keeping them from burning in the hell their idol-worshiping heathen ways are bound to provide. So far, so funny, huh? Actually, the Catholics were laughing hysterically on opening night - especially when the priest finally gives the pert young thing her comeuppance. Riotous applause ensued.

In this chintz-covered Georgia domicile, Mary is the self-confessed "mean" one, who loves nothing more than telling everyone precisely how they should act and exactly where they should get off if they don't measure up to her expectations. Margaret is sweet-tempered and soft-hearted; she gives everyone the benefit of the doubt, and she readily believes what young Melissa is saying about resurrection, the afterlife and (gasp!) the Pope. Mary is infuriated when Margaret invites the girl back, and she hatches a plot to ensnare Melissa in her misconceptions. She invites their parish priest for dinner and blindsides him with her exhortation to "Crush her! Demolish her!"

Melissa erroneously thinks the padre is Margaret's husband. After a long time of holding his tongue (saving it

for the banana pudding), the priest finally admits to having been educated at Seminary. In Valley Girl response, Melissa shrieks, "Shut up!" When Father Murphy finally does, reluctantly, go after her with sane arguments (as versus her belief that yoga postures are satanic), she fears she may have to quit this business and "go back to the Lancôme counter." And yet, she has succeeded in shaking the foundations of Mary *and* Margaret, and even making the priest think twice. At the end, all four return to their own corners, licking wounds, recovering beliefs, and pretty much picking up where they left off. And Melissa goes on to the next house.

If this sounds like your cup of theater, be my guest. The best I can say is that it's a wonderful production of an inconsequential trifle. Under the direction of Kim Rubenstein (currently on the acting faculty at UCSD), the cast is splendid. I could see the first-rate Robin Pearson Rose in the role of Margaret (she had to leave the cast unexpectedly, due to a family emergency), but Mikel Sarah Lambert is completely up to the task, bringing a simple-hearted warmth to the slight role. James Sutorius, a marvel in all his prior Globe appearances ("The Price," "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," "Lincolnesque"), is admirably grounded and slightly discomfited as the self-doubting priest. Kimberly Parker Green brings a dogged earnestness to Melissa, without making her into a total cartoon. And Nancy Robinette has a field-day with Mary, the juiciest of the characters, by far.

The costumes (Judith Dolan) and lighting (Alan Burrett) are pitch-perfect, though some of the interstitial music (sound by Paul Peterson) seems a little too rock-infused for the likes of these folks. Country would've suited them just fine. And a laugh-track, too.

THE LOCATION: The Old Globe's temporary arena stage at the Museum of Art. (619) 23-GLOBE (234-5623; www.theoldglobe.org)

THE DETAILS: Tickets: \$29-62. Tuesday-Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 7 p.m., Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m., through November 1.



"Anything Goes" at Lyric Opera San Diego. (Photo by Craig Deutsch)

Polite Porter

THE SHOW: *Anything Goes*, the classic Cole Porter musical, at Lyric Opera San Diego

The name of the show (which had changed a number of times) reflected the desperation with which it was put together in 1934. As goofy and ridiculous as the plot is, the score is nonpareil; one spectacular Cole Porter song after another ("I Get a Kick Out of You," "You're the Top," "Blow, Gabriel, Blow," "It's De-Lovely," "Friendship" and of course, the title tune). It was written for Ethel Merman, with a book by comic writer P.G. Wodehouse (as well as Guy Bolton, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse). The humor is of the pun/groan

The real Jesus prevails in 'Savannah Disputation'

By **CHARLENE BALDRIDGE** | DOWNTOWN NEWS

The West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation," a comedy about serious matters of faith, is highly recommended. It concerns two aging Roman Catholic parishioners, Mary and Margaret, who attend Father Murphy's church. Mary (Nancy Robinette) is especially cantankerous, having had a youthful marriage that failed due to her husband's infidelity. Her never-married sister, Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert), enjoys a simple, uncomplicated life, never questioning the rituals and routines of faith and existence.

A long way from "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You," "The Savannah Disputation" is intelligent, profound and at the same time excruciatingly funny. The playwright refuses to take sides, and life itself is called into question. It's a terrific play and a marvelous production, sublimely acted.

As usual, the Globe production values are tops, with scenic design by Deb O, costumes by Judith Dolan, lighting by Alan Burrett (professor of design at UCSD) and sound by Paul Peterson. Even though the setting is contemporary Savannah, the attitudes, the furnishings and the disputation itself suggest earlier times in long ago places.

"Savannah Disputation" continues at 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays; 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Nov. 1 at the Old Globe Arena Stage at Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park.

For tickets (\$29-\$62), visit www.theoldglobe.org or call (619) 23-GLOBE.

LA JOLLA VILLAGE NEWS

October 15, 2009

'Savannah' links to La Jolla through cast and UCSD

By CHARLENE BALDRIDGE | VILLAGE NEWS

The West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's "The Savannah Disputation" has several links to La Jolla. Principally, it is staged by Kim Rubinstein, former associate artistic director at Long Wharf Theatre and a member of the acting faculty at University of California, San Diego. Actor James Sutorius, who played a leading role in La Jolla Playhouse's "The Farnsworth Invention," portrays Father Murphy, winner of the titular disputation.

The comedy about serious matters of faith is highly recommended and concerns two aging Roman Catholic parishioners, Mary and Margaret, who attend Father Murphy's church. Mary (Nancy Robinette) is especially cantankerous, having had a youthful marriage that failed due to her husband's infidelity. Her never-married sister, Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert), enjoys a simple, uncomplicated life, never questioning the rituals and routines of faith and existence. The play opens with Mary's speech about mass. She deplores the "sign of the peace" part of the service, in which congregants greet one another with a handshake or a hug. Of late she's felt obligated to touch indigents who are unwashed, unsanitary and downright smelly, and she doesn't like it one bit. As a matter of fact, Mary doesn't like much of anything, unless it's the arrival of Father Murphy (Sutorius) for his weekly dinner at the Savannah home she shares with Margaret.

Goodness, the status quo, the Catholic faith and the complacency of the unquestioned life are thrown into disarray by the arrival of Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), a budding evangelist charged with going out to save everyone, including Roman Catholics. She declares the only way to salvation is through Jesus



Mikel Sarah Lambert (left) and Kimberly Parker Green in "The Savannah Disputation," through Nov. 1 at the Old Globe. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Christ, and there's no way Margaret can know that kind of Jesus, being Roman Catholic. Melissa is armed with religious tracts as well as the usual anti-Roman rhetoric, including charges of idolatry, popery, etc. Margaret is appalled but fascinated and tells Mary, who plans the confrontation of the priest and the Pentecostal. Melissa arrives not knowing Father Murphy is a priest and as the disputation wears on, a formidable theologian who matches her Biblical chapter and verse.

A long way from "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All for You," "The Savannah Disputation" is intelligent, profound and at the same time excruciatingly funny. The playwright refuses to take sides, and life itself is called into question. It's a ter-

rific play and a marvelous production, sublimely acted. As usual, the Globe production values are tops, with scenic design by Deb O, costumes by Judith Dolan, lighting by Alan Burrett (professor of design at UCSD) and sound by Paul Peterson. Even though the setting is contemporary Savannah, the attitudes, the furnishings and the disputation itself suggest earlier times in long ago places.

"Savannah Disputation" continues at 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays; 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Nov. 1 at the Old Globe Arena Stage at Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park. For tickets (\$29-\$62), visit www.theoldglobe.org or call (619) 23-GLOBE. ■

SAN DIEGO UPTOWN NEWS

October 16, 2009

Quirky characters in 'Disputation' tackle theology with brisk humor

"THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION"

When: Through Nov. 1. Showtimes,
7 p.m. Tue., Wed., Sun.; 8 p.m.
Thurs.-Sat.; 2 p.m. Sat.-Sun.

Where: Arena Stage at Copley Audi-
torium/San Diego Museum of Art

Tickets: \$29-\$62

Info: (619) 23-GLOBE

Web: www.TheOldGlobe.org

BY PATRICIA MORRIS BUCKLEY

Those who aren't ready for a full-spirited philosophical discussion on the virtues and detriments of various Christian religions will not find "The Savannah Disputation" their cup of tea.

However, if such an argument on the history and various belief systems of the church could be lively and interesting, it's in Evan Smith's thought-provoking and devilishly funny script. Smith made a couple of smart choices from the start.

see Savannah, page 21



Courtesy Old Globe

(l. to r.) Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa in "The Savannah Disputation."

FROM PAGE 19

SAVANNAH: Play opens with a knock

First, the show is brisk a 90 minutes with no intermission. Any longer, and it would have dragged like an overly long sermon on a sweltering July Sunday morning. Second, Smith chooses strong, quirky characters to tell his story so it isn't merely a dry theological petition. It's a no-holds-barred disputation in the true meaning of the word.

The play begins with a knock on the door of two middle-aged sisters. Young, perky and full of the certainty only a young 20s woman can have, missionary Melissa has arrived to convert Margaret and Mary into Christians, telling them that Catholics aren't really Christians. The cantankerous and downright nasty Mary runs the poor girl off, but Melissa comes back to speak to the meeker and dimmer Margaret, befuddling the old maid's already over-taxed mind.

"I already believe in Jesus," says Margaret. "But not in the right way. The way that gets you into Heaven," the missionary replies.

So the sisters arrange for Melissa to return, only they'll have another visitor — Father Murphy. So when Melissa gets going on the holy roll, Mary turns to the Father and says, "Let her have it! We want you to crush her!"

The real anchor of the show is

FROM PAGE 21

SAVANNAH: Tight pace, crisp direction

Father Murphy and the extraordinary performance by James Sutorius. The Father handles each woman's spirit with equal gentleness and firmness. Sutorius never goes for the over-the-top performance he could have, showing amazing control over the text and the subtext. It's a masterful turn that is easily the most interesting element in the production.

Nancy Robinette is truly unlikable as Mary, who in the end needs the most mercy. As Margaret, Mikel Sarah Lambert is a last-minute replacement for San

Diego favorite Robin Pearson Rose, but her performance is calming and sympathetic. A true balm in Gilead.

As a strident member of the small sect of the Evangelical Church of the Holy Spirit Alliance Church, Kimberly Parker Green is a true revelation. Green graduated from the Old Globe/USD MFA program last year and with her porcelain perfect looks, she at first appears to be lightweight and shallow, but looks are deceptive in her case. Green gives Melissa a steel frame as well as a vulnerable underbelly that is quite touching.

Kim Rubinstein's direction is crisp, tightly paced and well versed on the religious material. The same praise can not

be given to set designer Deb O, whose only eye-catcher is placing the stage on top of stacks of books. In the program notes, she talks about researching historic homes of Savannah, but her layout is rumpled, incomplete and lacks any sense of architecture.

Well-acted and directed, "The Savannah Disputation" is a lively discussion on religion, mortality and compassion. Yet it still is just that — a scripted discussion. For some theatergoers, there's not enough lemon, sugar or cream to make this cup of tea appealing. ♦

Patricia Morris Buckley has been reviewing the arts in San Diego for 25 years.

see Savannah, page 23

SENIOR RAMBLINGS

Theatre Chat

I recently saw two theatrical presentations. The first, "The Savannah Disputation," was very good; the second, "Sammy," was sensational.

"The Savannah Disputation" was about religion, lack of, etc. It was excellently acted.

It's on until November 1 at the Old Globe. Written by Evan Smith, and directed by Kim Rubinstein, it's about two Catholic spinsters. When the good-natured spinster welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary in to their home, her conviction begins to waiver. The other spinster quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back in to the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a religious shake-down, and a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith.

The second presentation is "Sammy," all about Sammy Davis, Jr. This will be the hit at the Old Globe. Obba Babatunde, who is Sammy, is sensational. He sings, dances and acts beautifully. There is a cast of 17 Broadway singers and dancers. The actress who plays Rosa David, Sammy's grandmother, is wonderful. She has a great, unusual voice, and great charisma.

The book, music and lyrics is by Leslie Bricusse, with additional songs by Bricusse and Anthony Newley, directed by KeithGlover. It's at the Old Globe until November 8.



Senior Ramblings

C. DAVID KULMAN

The musical mentions Sammy's wives, including the Swedish Mai Britt, and his last wife, Altovese. There's also a scene when Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Studios, threatens Sammy with bodily harm if he doesn't immediately drop his girlfriend, Kim Novak.

Speaking of Sammy's girlfriends, a lady I've known for over 40 years, who was a showgirl and was often mistaken for Marilyn Monroe, went out with Sammy Davis Jr. and Mickey Rooney. She told me that these very short men were only short in stature! Next time I talk with her, I'll ask for more details, which I probably won't be able to pass on.

Miscellaneous Chat

One of the senior clubs to which I belong, Fellowship of Older Gays (FOG), had their 16th anniversary dinner at Tom Ham's Lighthouse on Harbor Island Drive on September 21. I attended as they were honoring their members over 80, which includes me. There were eight of us. Three of us live in my building. (No, it's not an old-age home.) I can say, a good time was had by all.

Cat Chat

Owning a cat may cut your risk of heart attack death, researches at the University of Minnesota's Zeenat Qureshi Stroke Research Center have found.

During a ten-year study, subjects with cats were 40 percent less likely

to die from a heart attack than their catless counterparts. Feline companionship may actually help combat heart-harming stress and anxiety: a comparable effect has already been shown in studies of dog owners.

If you've just lost your pet and are elderly (over 80), should you consider getting another pet? If you're considering it, contact your local Humane Society adoption counselors. They will have a list of questions to ask to make sure it's the right decision, based on your needs and lifestyle.

Age Chat

For we older "coots" who might

remember the following who are still alive, here are their current ages: Author Jackie Collins (62); author Anne Rice (68); actress Susan Sarandon (63); comedian Bill Dana (85); singer Al Martina (82); actor Ben Vereen (63); and Barbara Walters (80).

And, now, enjoy your youth if you still have it, and even your old age if you're still here. And, be sure to go on out and hold someone's hand!

(C. David Kulman can be reached at Presidio Sentinel, 325 W. Washington, Suite 2-181, San Diego, CA 92103.)

The Savannah Disputation



The Savannah Disputation San Diego's Old Globe Theatre Saturday, September 26, 2009

By Jack Lyons, Palm Springs Guides Theatre and Cinema Critic/Reviewer

Religion in the "Deep South" is On Stage at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre

Religion in America as a topic of discussion is widespread and very personal. But it's especially popular and very, very, personal in the Deep South, where it's... well, ... where... it's a religion!

The subject has been known to turn family members against one another at the dropping of, or a misstatement of, a favorite biblical passage or verse. Why men have even gone to war over it. But everyone is definitely going to Hell, in playwright Evan Smith's hilarious new comedy play, "The Savannah Disputation", unless, that is, you're on the winning side.

The seemingly superficial comedy dares to go, philosophically that is, where very few recent plays have gone – into personally held beliefs and unyielding positions concerning religion in America. There are no "red states vs. blue states" character confrontations here. It's just a good old-fashioned comedy between people of differing convictions verbally "duking it out". No fisticuffs on or off-stage were in evidence the night I saw it.

Upon closer examination, however, there are subtle suggestions and dialogue that could raise doubts, or generate a slight uneasiness, for those in the audience not up to snuff on their bibles or catechisms. This is where playwright Smith excels. He lays his premise out there; kick-starts his comedy, and let's the characters and audience take it from there.

In short, the story set in Georgia, revolves around two aging Catholic spinster sisters. Mary, the younger of the two (Nancy Robinette) is a passionate but laissez faire Catholic. "If you don't hear the Pope say it, you don't have to do it!" However, there's a lot of frustration surrounding Mary's small town existence. Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) on the other hand, is sweet and gentle and worries that her more outspoken and fiesty sister, may not be able to join her in heaven. Their weekly routine is broken every Thursday evening when Fr. Murphy (James Sutorius) their local parish priest drops by for dinner. So far, it all sounds sort of prosaic. That is until Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), an evangelical Christian missionary enters the picture.

We have all, at one time or another, been visited at our front door by perky, (think Reese Witherspoon) bright faced young women who are hard to say "No" to when they innocently ask to come inside our homes to discuss being saved by the Lord Jesus. When it happens to Mary, she firmly lays down the gauntlet of rejection "We're Catholics here, no thank you". Melissa merely views her comment as one more challenge in the effort to "save" and convert her and politely retreats - but only to return another day with more pamphlets in hand. A "Thursday" evening seems like a nice choice for the comedic battle of wits, words, and philosophy to take place. Perhaps Fr. Murphy might enjoy the repartee following dinner.

Eventually, Fr. Murphy becomes involved as sort of a facilitator trying to keep the discussion civilized as well as reasonably accurate. The bottom-line to all the intense stares, verbal seek and destroy zingers, and "gotcha moments" is that no one really moves from their original beliefs. It's the audience who has most of the fun as they witness all of the theological posturing that takes place in this 90-minute, no intermission production.

Director Kim Rubinstein cleverly puts her excellent cast through their paces on the most cluttered set I've seen in 20 years. It is fascinating just watching the actors effortlessly move and maneuver their way through and around tables, chairs, beds, stacks of books, and each other. Also, wouldn't a few more colorful cultural "southernisms" be a welcome addition? I see this play finding its way onto every community theatre stage in America once the word gets out and it's available.

"The Savannah Disputation", the final production in the Old Globe's temporary "second stage" home at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium, runs through November 1, 2009. Don't miss it.

The Old Globe Theatre is located in Balboa Park
1363 Old Globe Way (at Village Pl)
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Entertainment :: Theatre

The Savannah Disputation
 by Steve Heyl
 EDGE Contributor
 Sunday Oct 4, 2009

 The cast of The Savannah Disputation
 (Source: http://www.theoldglobe.org/pressphotos/savannah_disputation_press.html)

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(James Sutorius), to their home for a dinner. This leads to a tit-for-tat Biblical discussion, not exactly the stuff of box office success. In lesser hands, the subject matter could fall into parody or melodrama territory, yet Evan Smith's (Psych, The Uneasy Chair and the Naked TV pilot of Debs) script gives us real characters and thoughtful dialog. Even the many Biblical quotations are examined in interesting ways.

The discussion is about more than competing beliefs of course. At its heart, The Savannah Disputation asks us to question what we really know about what we think we know, the unquestioned assumptions on which our world view is based and the psychic walls we erect to protect the ideas we hold dear. Mary and especially Margaret have long held views of heaven that they find out are not quite what the Church teaches. Melissa, trained to be (as she says) "a Catholic missionary, that is a missionary to Catholics" finds that some of the basis of that training may be flawed. Patrick has comfortable defenses for his state in life but no answers when pressed. These characters struggle in the context of their religion, but the basic question is relevant throughout the human experience.

This intelligent script is matched by a solid cast. Ms. Lambert was a late addition to the cast, replacing a previously announced actress, but her portrayal of Margaret is right on target, with a perfect mixture of Southern charm and daffiness which she makes the most of in a sight gag involving Christmas presents. Mr. Sutorius gives Patrick a thoughtfulness rarely seen in depictions of Irish clergy. Melissa is arguably the most difficult role in the show - in the wrong hands she can easily become a caricature. Ms. Green's performance balances the facets of the character beautifully. When she suddenly breaks her Southern manners and lets loose at Margaret she does so very naturally. Ms. Robinette makes a stunning Old Globe debut as Mary, never letting us forget that beneath the generally sour disposition there is a real person.

"Are you saved?" That's the second line of **The Savannah Disputation** and half of the audience reacts in uneasy silence while the other half erupts in laughter. This show, a west coast premier at the Old Globe in San Diego, has many moments like that - the same line funny to some, serious to others.

On the surface, it couldn't sound like a drearier premise for a show: Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), a perky born-again evangelist, tries to convert lifelong Catholics Mary (Nancy Robinette) and her sister Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert). Margaret will have none of it, but Mary finds her faith questioned by the young woman's questions.

In hopes of ambushing her, Margaret invite Patrick, their parish priest




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I had two minor technical beefs with the show. The music between scenes felt quite out of context, neither relevant to the action nor something the characters would listen to. While I thought the decision to float the entire stage on stacks of books was inspired, the in-the-round setting opened the show up, giving the characters too much room for their confrontations.

Many will read the description of this show and bypass it because they are not Catholic and that would be a mistake. Regardless of your religious persuasion (or not), everyone will find something to laugh about and something to think about in this show. And that's a good thing, no disputation.

The Savannah Disputation runs through November 1 at the Old Globe Theater (Arena Stage) through November 1. theoldglobe.org

A computer geek by day, one of Steve's evening loves is San Diego theater (the other is his husband of 20 years), which he enjoys sharing with others (theater, not the husband).

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"The Savannah Disputation"

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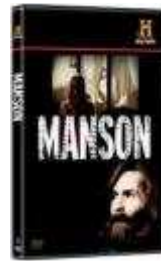
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The Theater Times

POSTED OCTOBER 21

From Handshake to Arm Twist

Kimberly Parker Green tries to frighten the B-Jesus out of Catholic sisters Mikel Sarah Lambert and Nancy Robinette in Kim Rubenstein's staging of the Evan Smith comedy. James Sutorius also stars.



The Old Globe Theatre is staging "The Savannah Disputation," a probing comedy that pits a young bible-thumping Protestant against the bulwark of Catholicism - two Irish-American Southerners and their parish Priest.

Smith gets the best of both worlds, with a crowd-pleasing entertainment that also stirs the stew pot of intra-Christian denominational diversity. Yeah: all that and laughs.

Kim Rubenstein directs the piece on the Globe's temporary space down at the art museum.

[Read the review.](#)

The Theater Times

The Savannah Disputation

by Evan Smith
directed by Kim Rubenstein

[The Old Globe Theatre](#) • September 26 - November 1, 2009 (Opened, rev'd 10/11e)

WITH Kimberly Parker Green, Mikel Sarah Lambert, Nancy Robinette, James Sutorius **PRODUCTION** Deb O, set; Judith Dolan, costumes; Alan Burrett, lights; Paul Peterson, sound; Anjee Nero, stage management **HISTORY** Originally premiered at Writers' Theatre, Glencoe, Illinois; New York premiere at Playwrights Horizons in 2009 **West Coast Premiere**

There is serious scholarship behind the comic arm-twisting that propels Evan Smith's new play, The Savannah Disputation, currently receiving its West Coast premiere at the Old Globe Theatre (through November 1). Kim Rubenstein's staging taps both the gravity and levity that characterize the eternal face-off between opposing faiths, and her crack quartet of actors helps make this a big feather in a Globe cap that had slipped recently under the shifting weight of some big, less-balanced musicals.

Savannah provides the setting for the kitchen-table showdown between a door-to-door proselytizer named Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green) and Catholic sisters Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) and Mary (Nancy Robinette). Melissa's evangelical congregation has sent her out to clack doorknockers in search of convertible Catholics. When she happens on Margaret, the older, kindly half of these good-cop/bad-cop sisters, the perky Protestant zeroes in. She leaves literature and promises to return to answer any questions about it. Mary, who wears the prickly bitterness of a long-abandoned wife, returns home, spots one of Melissa's pamphlets, and orders Margaret to call off the second visit. But Margaret, who never married, believes one's faith should be a conscious choice, embraced because it holds its own against other religions and denominations. Mary, on the other hand, clings to the faith of her father and sees any competing view as an attack.

She is surprised when Melissa shows up and even more irate that her sister has not followed her commandment. She immediately goes after the front porch preacher with the squawk and flutter of a barnyard hen. But when her hollow, lip-service understanding of doctrine is shredded by Melissa's well-researched message, a Bible-based disputing of Catholic fundamentals, she pretends to be interested in learning more, and invites Melissa back – on the evening her parish priest, Father Murphy (James Sutorius), has his weekly meal with the sisters. Murphy and Melissa will arrive unaware of the grudge match.

Loneliness is a common theme that Smith uses to connect the four characters. The spinster and her sister, living together because no one else is interested in them, the celibate father, and a young divorcee needing to find someone in the shallow pool of her upstart church. All appear closer to their

God than their species.

Each actor presents his or her case, each works the material beautifully. Green shifts smoothly from the pretty coed who gets in the door to the tough salesperson out to close the deal. Sutorius wears well Murphy's role as representative of a 2000-year-old tradition. He waits for his moment to make his point, as he has through thousands of confessions. The sisters are nicely drawn, with Robinette having the hardest assignment, creating a hateful woman we don't hate. She does about as well as one can imagine.

Deb O's set is functional if not particularly memorable, but she is hemmed in by the lack of walls and, unlike the Cassius Carter this replaces, no way to drop ceiling pieces, etc. Judith Dolan provides the costumes; Alan Burrett is lighting designer and Paul Peterson contributes the sound.

The Savannah Disputation proves as funny as it is well-informed. For those who enjoy their religious perspectives at a secular stage, their faith in the Old Globe will be redoubled by Smith's rewarding play.

Mikel Sarah Lambert

Kimberly Parker Green

CRAIG SCHWARTZ





FEATURES



A LITTLE 'DISPUTATION' IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Globe's latest effort takes on
religious questions that echo today's
political bickering



Kim Rubinstein (center) directs a confrontation between Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green, left) and Mary (Nancy Robinette) in rehearsals for "The Savannah Disputation," the Old Globe Theatre's comic saga of religious rancor. *John Gibbins / Union-Tribune*

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

On two sides, true believers. In the middle, a monumental text, from which each party draws its gospels. And all around, dissension, resentment, even rage.

That's the volatile setting of "The Savannah Disputation," the Old Globe Theatre's new play whose key conflict involves starkly opposed visions of Christianity and the Bible's dictates.

But it could almost as easily describe current political life, with Americans staking out positions and ramping up hostilities over, say, health-care reform and what the endless pages of proposed legislation do or don't say on matters of life and death.

In Evan Smith's humor-laced but serious-minded play, two Catholic sisters in Georgia — one a church stalwart, the other not so sure where she stands — face a test of faith when a

fervent young Pentecostal evangelist arrives on their doorstep and tries to convert them.

Some of the most contentious arguments develop over what interpretation of scripture is the true Word, as well as what (if anything) the Bible says definitively on such matters as the concept of purgatory or what happens to the body in the afterlife.

Though Smith wrote "The Savannah Disputation" two years ago, it's hard not to hear echoes of the latest partisan political bickering in the way the play's characters cling so tightly to their positions and get hung up on sometimes phantom ideas ("death panels," anyone?).

"The issues become polarized," says Ronald A. Pachence, a priest and Ph.D. theologian who teaches at the University of San Diego and has been advising the production.

SEE 'Savannah,' E2

"The Savannah Disputation" Old Globe Theatre **When:** Previews begin Saturday. Opens Oct. 1. **Schedule:** Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m.; through Nov. 1 **Where:** Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's Copley Auditorium, Balboa Park **Tickets:** \$29-\$62 **Phone:** (619) 234-5623 **Online:** TheOldGlobe.org

► 'SAVANNAH'

CONTINUED FROM E1

USD priest is giving guidance for Globe staging

"That seems to be the mood of the country these days. It's kind of hard to get the blues and the reds playing off the same page. There's a great deal of mutual suspicion. And that's clear in the play, isn't it? An unwillingness — (at least) at first — to listen to each other."

Central casting

When it comes to finding an adviser, the Globe could have looked a long time for someone better suited to this play — literally and otherwise — than Pachence.

"You could've cast him as Father Murphy (the sisters' own priest)," says playwright Smith, who's been in town during rehearsals. "He came in basically wearing the same costume the designer had sketched out for the character" — right down to (as Smith describes in his notes for the play) "the kind of shoe that is really a sneaker although it attempts to pass itself off as a

dress shoe."

Pachence's serendipitous connections to the play go further than that. He went to high school in Savannah, Smith's hometown and the setting of the play; in fact, it's still his home diocese (though he's been in San Diego since 1981). Pachence even knows a priest and bishop mentioned in the play — they're former teachers of his.

Pachence also has served for years as a volunteer usher at the Globe. (His group is scheduled to work opening night, Oct. 1.) On top of that, "I did a little acting in my younger years," he says. "I was the barber in '(Man of) La Man-

cha,' " at the school where he formerly worked in Buffalo, NY.

At a recent "Savannah" rehearsal, Pachence fielded questions on Catholic doctrine, Latin pronunciation and plenty else from director Kim Rubinstein and the play's cast: Kimberly Parker Green (who plays the evangelist Melissa); James Sutorius (as Father Murphy); Nancy Robinette (as the headstrong Mary); and Robin Pearson Rose (who was to play the more doubting sister Margaret but has left the cast due to a family emergency. Mikel Sarah Lambert takes over the role).

Pachence says he has seen plenty of the type of intra-faith conflict that heats up in the play "right here in River City," borrowing a quote from "The Music Man" (the good Father knows his shows).

At times in "Savannah," Mary and Margaret are as much at odds with each other as they are

of the play was its twist of putting people of the same broad religious tradition at odds with each other.

"The basic tenets of Christianity and Catholicism and any religion, really, are that you're supposed to work from love and kindness, supposed to treat other human beings with respect and humor and kindness," Rubinstein says.

"But this argument between being a (non-Catholic) Christian or a Catholic makes people treat each other the opposite of that — to be judgmental and disrespectful and noncompassionate."

It so happens that the issue of health enters the play in a direct way: One of the sisters (the play doesn't clarify which) is about to receive potentially devastating results of medical tests.

To Rubinstein, that fact grounds the characters' squabbles about seemingly academic

from doctors. (Rubinstein's mother died of cancer at age 49, and the director herself was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at 23.)

"Even if you're not someone who prays, those are the moments you do."

Although it was the playwright Smith's dismay with political events in Georgia that prompted him to pen "Savannah," he is cautious about drawing too many connections between the play and current debates.

But he does see one specific parallel: "People on the left and the right, they throw their lot in with a tribe. They look to someone to explain things to them. And whoever they put that trust in, they believe." (That kind of behavior "definitely tilts toward the right," he argues.)

"It becomes a case of, if something really is too complicated — if you don't have time

Although it was the playwright Smith's dismay with political events in Georgia that prompted him to pen "Savannah," he is cautious about drawing too many connections between the play and current debates.

with Melissa. Father Murphy, whom Mary has invited over to try and refute Melissa's arguments, finds himself early on in the odd position of being Melissa's defender.

"There are folks who are very, very staunch," Pachence says. "They simply repeat what they heard their parents say, or whatever training they had. They don't really reflect much on it."

For Rubinstein, who heads UCSD's undergrad acting program and directed "The American Plan" at the Globe last year, one attractive aspect

matters in some sobering realities.

"At the moment when you most need a solid foundation, so you can (deal with) a death sentence — or what we think might be a death sentence — instead this evangelist comes to the door and tries to pull the rug out from under that foundation at a very crucial moment," she says, speaking of the sisters' crisis of faith.

"For me, it's such a big part of what I was interested in doing this play. Just from my own terrifying experience of waiting to hear about test results

to read 1,700 pages of a proposed bill, if you aren't a scientist and don't have access to the raw data on global warming — you pick somebody to believe."

And then political positions can transform into articles of faith.

"I think the theological disputation is a foil for human behavior in general, where we dig ourselves into trenches and camps," Pachence says. "You saw some of that on TV (recently)," referring to a Republican congressman's shouts of "Liar!" during President Obama's speech on health care reform.

"I can't presume to say what (the playwright) had in mind, but it sounds to me as if it's bigger than just a dispute over a particular piece of theological trivia. It's something that's kind of in our face right now in our country. But I think it also goes very deep. It's very old."

James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com; blog, houseseats.uniontrib.com; Twitter, jimhebert

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Globe director calls 'Savannah' surprisingly timely

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PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, September 23, 2009 9:05 am | No Comments Posted

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"Savannah Disputation" features, second from left, Jmes Sutorius, Kimberly Parker Green and Nancy Robinette. Robin Pearson Rose, seen at far left, left the production for a family emergency and has been replaced by Mikel Sarah Lambert (not pictured). (Courtesy photo)

On the surface, Evan Smith's comedy "The Savannah Disputation" sounds like an episode from television's "The Golden Girls." Two elderly spinster sisters living together in Savannah, Ga. (one bright, the other, not so much) face off in a zany theological tug-of-war after a door-to-door missionary causes one sister's Catholic faith to waver.

But Kim Rubinstein, who directs the 75-minute play in its West Coast premiere at the Old Globe Theatre this week, said that appearances can be deceiving. While the play is rife with comic hijinx and fast-paced repartee, there are serious issues at play that could serve as a lesson for one of the great problems vexing the world today: religious intolerance.

Rubinstein ---- who made her Globe directing debut last year with "The American Plan" ---- has just finished up at UC San Diego directing Jason Grote's "1001" (a postmodernist take on "The Arabian Nights" stories that deals with tensions in the Middle East) and she was intrigued with how both "1001" and "The Savannah Disputation" dealt with the same issues in very different ways.

"Both plays are about our relationship with faith," Rubinstein said in a phone interview last week.

"They're about how we grow up with faith and how we resolve that as we become adults, whether we change and what it's for. The best part of faith is the way in which we learn to be kind to each other and how faith helps us with family and stability. The worst part is when people say 'my faith is the only faith and everybody else has to die.' Every faith says it preaches generosity and loving kindness to other human beings, but faith has led to all sorts of horrific acts of violence since time began."

In "The Savannah Disputation," sisters Margaret and Mary are coexisting peacefully until both their relationship and their faith are sorely tested. Younger sister Margaret invites Melissa, a young, evangelical missionary, into their home who challenges everything that Margaret believes in and causes her to question her faith. Her older sister, Mary, decides to fight fire with fire by inviting over their parish priest, Father Murphy, and the fireworks (religious and otherwise) begin to fly.

"The play seems to be about faith," Rubinstein said, "but it's also about how people live their lives day to day and how they treat each other."

Rubinstein described the play more as a domestic comedy than a slapstick or religious comedy.

"The humor comes from human behavior and the foibles of being human ---- the way in which we have enormous desires and those bump into reality and how we have to manage that," she said. "All four people are lonely people who are outsiders. They're dingbats. They've tried to live in the world and want to be popular like everybody else. The humor comes from the collision of what we expect and desire and the reality and the obstacles that get in the way."

The Globe production hit a major stumbling block about three weeks ago when one of the four actors in the cast (San Diego actress Robin Pearson Rose, who was cast as Margaret) was forced to drop out during rehearsals when her mother became ill. Rubinstein said the emergency came so close to the opening that she wasn't sure the production would be able to proceed. Fortunately, one of the actresses who'd auditioned for the role (Mikel Sarah Lambert) was still available and flew in on a few days notice to join the rehearsals in progress.

"It was a miracle to get her and she is amazing. She's been here two days in rehearsal and it's wonderful how it's all coming together. I know this will work," Rubinstein said. "We're rethinking things from a new perspective because she brings a different energy and the other actors are learning about her and building a new energy around her."

Also featured in the production are Nancy Robinette as Mary, Kimberly Parker Green (Helena in the Globe's 2008 "All's Well That Ends Well") as Melissa, and James Sutorius (a San Diego Theatre Critics Circle award winner for his chameleon-like performance in the Globe's 2006 "Lincolnesque") as Father Murphy.

Rubinstein is the former associate artistic director at Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Conn., where she directed musicals, comedies, and classics. She has also directed Shakespeare plays around the country and was associate director of the national touring production of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America." The playwright, Smith, also wrote "The Uneasy Chair" (seen in its West Coast premiere two years ago at North Coast Repertory Theatre), and "Psych." The Yale School of Drama grad also wrote

the pilot for Naked TV's "Debs."

Rubinstein said audiences don't really need to know a lot about Catholicism or religious faith before they arrive at performances of "The Savannah Disputation."

"All you need to arrive with is your own questions about not only 'what do I believe?' but also 'do I have tolerance, interest and curiosity in what other people believe?' This is not just in terms of faith, but in terms of everyday interactions with other human beings," Rubinstein said. "I think people will laugh but they may also be enlightened a little bit."

"The Savannah Disputation"

When: Opens Saturday and runs through Nov. 1; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays

Where: The Old Globe at the Arena Stage, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$29-\$59

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Robinette, Rose, Green and Sutorius Put Their Faith in *Savannah Disputation* at Old Globe

By Kenneth Jones
September 3, 2009

Old Globe Theatre's new production Evan Smith's comedy about faith, religion and intolerance, *The Savannah Disputation*, will feature Nancy Robinette and Robin Pearson Rose as Roman Catholic sisters confronted by a Pentacostal missionary played by Kimberly Parker Green.

The San Diego, CA, production, directed by Kim Rubinstein, will play the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium Sept. 26–Nov. 1.

James Sutorius plays Father Murphy, the sisters' priest, who is invited to a meal to help discredit their fundamentalist visitor.

The West Coast premiere of the play, previously seen Off-Broadway, opens Oct. 1.

According to Old Globe, "*The Savannah Disputation* is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith."

Smith's *The Savannah Disputation* enjoyed a successful run at New York's Playwrights Horizons, as did his previous plays, *Psych* and *The Uneasy Chair*. His other works include *Servicemen* and *Daughters of Genius*. His TV pilot, "Debs," was a part of *Naked TV*, produced by Fox TV/Naked Angels. Smith is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and the recipient of a Whiting Award.

The creative team includes Deb O (scenic design), Judith Dolan (costume design), Alan Burrett (lighting design), Paul Peterson (sound design) and Anjee Nero (stage manager).

Green previously appeared at the Globe in *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and received her MFA from The Old Globe/University of San Diego. Nancy Robinette (Mary) is making her Globe debut. Her Off-Broadway credits include *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* and *Finally Flannery*. Rose (Margaret) is an Old Globe associate artist and has appeared in the Globe productions of *Vincent in Brixton*, *All My Sons* (Best Actress, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award), *Da, Voir Dire*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Wonderful Tennessee* and *Remembrance*. Her Broadway credits include *Holiday* and *The Visit*. James Sutorius has been seen at the Globe in *The Price*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (2007 Best Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award) and *Lincolnesque* (2006 Best Featured Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award). On Broadway, he has appeared in *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Conversations with My Father*, *The Changing Room*, *Hamlet* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

Savannah Disputation, Comedy About Faith and Intolerance, Begins at Old Globe Sept. 26

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
26 Sep 2009



Kimberly Parker Green

Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*, a comedy about faith, religion, Biblical interpretation and intolerance, gets its West Coast premiere beginning Sept. 26 in a staging by The Old Globe in San Diego.

Nancy Robinette and Mikel Sarah Lambert play Roman Catholic sisters confronted by a Pentacostal missionary played by Kimberly Parker Green. James Sutorius plays Father Murphy, the sisters' priest, who is invited to a meal to help discredit their fundamentalist visitor.

The production, directed by Kim Rubinstein, plays the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium through Nov. 1.

Previously seen Off-Broadway, the play opens, in this new production, on Oct. 1.

According to Old Globe, "*The Savannah Disputation* is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith."

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Green previously appeared at the Globe in *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and received her MFA from The Old Globe/University of San Diego. Robinette (Mary) is making her Globe debut. Her Off-Broadway credits include *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* and *Finally*.

Flannery. Lambert (Margaret) appeared at the Globe in 2007 as Clara in Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. Sutorius has been seen at the Globe in *The Price*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (2007 Best Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award) and *Lincolnesque* (2006 Best Featured Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award). On Broadway, he has appeared in *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Conversations with My Father*, *The Changing Room*, *Hamlet* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

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Savannah Disputation, Smith's Comedy About Absolute Religion, Opens at Old Globe Oct. 1

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
01 Oct 2009



Savannah Disputation stars Mikel Sarah Lambert and Kimberly Parker Green
photo by Craig Schwartz

Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*, a comedy about faith, religion, Biblical interpretation and intolerance, opens Oct. 1 in its West Coast premiere at The Old Globe in San Diego.

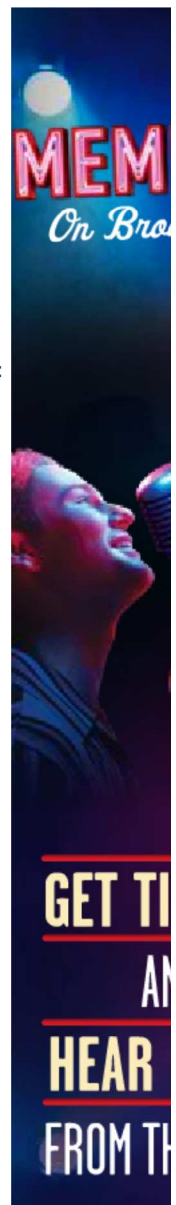
Nancy Robinette and Mikel Sarah Lambert play Roman Catholic sisters confronted by a Pentacostal missionary played by Kimberly Parker Green. James Sutorius plays Father Murphy, the sisters' priest, who is invited to a meal to help discredit their fundamentalist visitor.

The production, directed by Kim Rubinstein, plays the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium through Nov. 1.

Previously seen Off-Broadway, the play, in this new production, began Sept. 26.

According to Old Globe, "*The Savannah Disputation* is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith."

Smith's *The Savannah Disputation* enjoyed a successful run at New York's Playwrights Horizons, as did his previous plays, *Psych* and *The Uneasy Chair*. His other works include *Servicemen* and *Daughters of*



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Genius. His TV pilot, "Debs," was a part of Naked TV, produced by Fox TV/Naked Angels. Smith is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and the recipient of a Whiting Award.

The creative team includes Deb O (scenic design), Judith Dolan (costume design), Alan Burrett (lighting design), Paul Peterson (sound design) and Anjee Nero (stage manager).

Green previously appeared at the Globe in *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and received her MFA from The Old Globe/University of San Diego. Robinette (Mary) is making her Globe debut. Her Off-Broadway credits include *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* and *Finally Flannery*. Lambert (Margaret) appeared at the Globe in 2007 as Clara in Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. Sutorius has been

seen at the Globe in *The Price*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (2007 Best Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award) and *Lincolnesque* (2006 Best Featured Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award). On Broadway, he has appeared in *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Conversations with My Father*, *The Changing Room*, *Hamlet* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.



Mikel Sarah Lambert and Nancy Robinette in *Savannah Disputation*
photo by Craig Schwartz

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'Savannah Disputation', Smith's Comedy About Absolute Religion, Opens at Old Globe

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Kenneth Jones, Playbill.com – 44 mins ago

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Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at [1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park](#).

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Photo Preview: THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION At The Old Globe

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by BWW News Desk

Old Globe Executive Producer [Lou Spisto](#) today announced the complete cast and creative team for the West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's comedy, THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION. Directed by Kim Rubinstein, THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION will run in the Globe's [Arena Stage](#) at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium Sept. 26 - Nov. 1, 2009. Previews run from Sept. 26 - Sept. 30. Opening night is Oct. 1 at 8:00 p.m. Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith.

"It's always a pleasure to introduce the work of emerging playwrights," said Spisto. "Evan Smith is a gifted young writer and we are pleased to be able to present his work to our audiences." THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION enjoyed a successful run at New York's [Playwrights Horizons](#), as did his previous plays, PSYCH and THE UNEASY CHAIR. His other works include SERVICEMEN and DAUGHTERS OF GENIUS. His TV pilot, "Debs," was a part of Naked TV, produced by Fox TV/[Naked Angels](#). Smith is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and the recipient of a Whiting Award.

The cast of The Savannah Disputation features Kimberly Parker Green (Melissa), Nancy Robinette (Mary), [Robin Pearson Rose](#) (Margaret) and [James Sutorius](#) (Father Murphy). The creative team includes Deb O (Scenic Design), [Judith Dolan](#) (Costume Design), [Alan Burrett](#) (Lighting Design), [Paul Peterson](#) (Sound Design) and Anjee Nero (Stage Manager).

Kim Rubinstein previously directed THE AMERICAN PLAN at [The Old Globe](#). She was most recently [Long Wharf Theatre](#)'s Associate Artistic Director where she directed GUYS AND DOLLS, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, PRIVATE LIVES, THE SANTALAND DIARIES and THE COCKTAIL HOUR. Regionally, she has directed MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING and ROMEO AND JULIET at Shakespeare Santa Cruz; THE INTELLIGENT DESIGN of Jenny Chow at Portland Center Stage and San Jose Repertory Theatre; and ROMEO AND JULIET, MACBETH and JULIUS CAESAR at [Chicago Shakespeare Theatre](#). Rubinstein was Associate Director with [Michael Mayer](#) and Tour Director of the national tour of ANGELS IN AMERICA.

Kimberly Parker Green previously appeared at the Globe in All's Well That Ends Well, Romeo & Juliet, Measure for Measure and The Two Gentlemen of Verona and received her MFA from [The Old Globe](#)/ University of San Diego. Nancy Robinette is making her Globe debut. Her Off Broadway credits include Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, Give Me Your Answer Do! and Finally Flannery. [Robin Pearson Rose](#) is an Old Globe Associate Artist and has appeared in the Globe productions of Vincent in Brixton, All My Sons (Best Actress, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle "Craig Noel" Award), Da, Voir Dire, Dancing at Lughnasa, Wonderful Tennessee and Remembrance. Her Broadway credits include Holiday and The Visit. She has also appeared Off Broadway in Summer and Smoke at Roundabout Theatre. [James Sutorius](#) as been seen at the Globe in The Price, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (2007 Best Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle "Craig Noel" Award) and Lincolnesque (2006 Best Featured Actor, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle "Craig Noel" Award). On Broadway, he has appeared in The Farnsworth Invention, Conversations with My Father, The Changing Room, Hamlet and The Cherry Orchard.

Tickets to THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619)

23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Performances begin on Sept. 26 and continue through Nov. 1. Ticket prices range from \$29 to \$62. Performance times: Previews: Saturday, Sept. 26 at 8:00 p.m., Sunday Sept. 27 at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 29, at 7:00 p.m. and Wednesday, Sept. 30 at 7:00 p.m. Regular Performances: Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m., and Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. Discounts are available for full-time students, patrons 29 years of age and under, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

[The Old Globe](#) is located in San Diego's Balboa Park at 1363 Old Globe Way. There are numerous free parking lots available throughout the park. Valet parking is also available (\$10). For additional parking information visit www.BalboaPark.org.

The Tony Award-winning Old Globe is one of the country's leading professional regional theaters and has stood as San Diego's flagship arts institution for 74 years. Under the direction of Executive Producer [Louis G. Spisto](#), [The Old Globe](#) produces a year-round season of 15 productions of classic, contemporary and new works on its three Balboa Park stages: the 580-seat [Old Globe Theatre](#), the 227-seat [Arena Stage](#) at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium (an interim second stage during construction of the new 250-seat Conrad Prebys Theatre Center) and the 612-seat outdoor Lowell Davies [Festival Theatre](#), home of its internationally renowned Shakespeare Festival. More than 250,000 people attend Globe productions annually and participate in the theater's education programs and outreach services. Numerous Broadway-bound premieres and revivals, such as THE FULL MONTY, DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS, A CATERED AFFAIR, and the annual holiday musical, [Dr. Seuss'](#) HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!, have been developed at [The Old Globe](#) and have gone on to enjoy highly successful runs in New York and at regional theaters across the country.

Photo courtesy of Old Globe



[Robin Pearson Rose](#), [James Sutorius](#), Kimberly Parker Green, and Nancy Robinette

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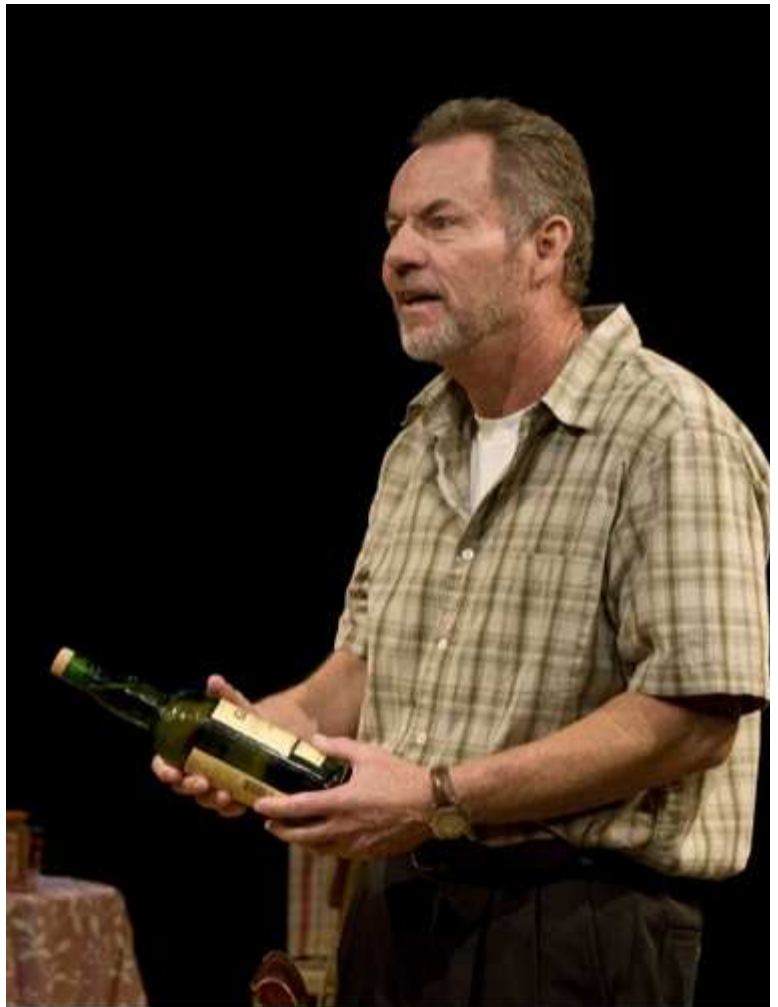
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Mikel Sarah Lambert Joins Cast Of THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION, Runs 9/26-11/1 At Arena Stage

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by BWW News Desk



[Mikel Sarah Lambert](#) will take on the role of Margaret in the West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*. The previously announced [Robin Pearson Rose](#) has left the cast due to an unexpected family emergency. Directed by Kim Rubinstein, *The Savannah Disputation* will run in the Globe's [Arena Stage](#) at the San

Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium Sept. 26 - Nov. 1, 2009. Previews run from Sept. 26 - Sept. 30. Opening night is Oct. 1 at 8:00 p.m. Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.



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The cast of *The Savannah Disputation* features [Kimberly Parker Green](#) (Melissa), [Mikel Sarah Lambert](#) (Margaret), [Nancy Robinette](#) (Mary) and [James Sutorius](#) (Father Murphy).

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Theater News

Kimberly Parker Green, Robin Pearson Rose, et al. Set for Old Globe's *Savannah Disputation*

By: [Brian Scott Lipton](#) · Sep 3, 2009 · San Diego

Full cast and creative team have been announced for the Old Globe Theatre's production of Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation*, to run September 26-November 1. The production will be directed by Kim Rubinstein.

The play concerns Margaret, a susceptible Catholic Spinster, whose faith begins to waver -- much to the chagrin of her feisty sister -- after she admits a Pentecostal missionary into her home.

The cast includes Kimberly Parker Green, Nancy Robinette, Robin Pearson Rose, and James Sutorius. The creative team includes Deb O (sets), Judith Dolan (costumes), Paul Peterson (sound), and Alan Burrett (lighting).

For more information, visit www.oldglobe.org.



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For more information, visit www.oldglobe.org.



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Of warfare, religious and psychological

BY JEAN LOWERISON

Published Thursday, 15-Oct-2009 in [issue 1138](#)

'The Savannah Disputation'

Theological discussions about nitpicky little points of biblical translation are best left to theologians and academics, but playwright Evan Smith puts them in the mouths of two elderly sisters, a pretty young fundamentalist and a tired priest in *The Savannah Disputation*.

The Old Globe Theatre presents Evan Smith's theological comedy (if that's quite the term) through Sunday, Nov. 1 at the Copley Auditorium of the San Diego Museum of Art. Kim Rubinstein directs.

Mary (Nancy Robinette) and her elder sister Margaret (Mikel Sarah Lambert) share a cluttered house in Savannah. They are Catholics (with saint statues and a huge Bible in view) and comfortable in their faith, imperfectly understood though it may be.

Fundamentalist Melissa (Kimberly Parker Green), whose own indoctrination has included assertions that Catholics are going to hell and yoga is "satanic," provides the conflict when she appears at the door with the opening gambit, "Are you saved?"

Mary, sharp of mind and tongue, does not suffer fools gladly, and her impatience makes her quick to use the label. She orders Melissa off the property with the promise to call the police the next time she appears.

But (you saw this coming, right?) Margaret, rounder of person and personality, and more tolerant of ideas not her own, lets Melissa in the back door and even takes a pamphlet.

The infuriated Mary, intent on "crushing" the young fanatic (what a Christian endeavor), sets up a second meeting which will include unsuspecting local parish priest Father Murphy (James Sutorius), who arrives expecting nothing more than his usual Thursday dinner with the sisters.

Smith has a talent for creating watchable characters, but may well alienate some audience members with the sitcom-like treatment of them and of the topic. Questions such as which "rock" Jesus built his church on (the answer to which depends on whether he said anything at all about it, and if so, which translation got it right) are more likely to put listeners to sleep than to engage them. We had more interesting discussions in the college dorm, where the question was whether there is a God, and whether it matters.

These are stock characters all, though Smith makes them fun to watch, especially with this fine cast. Robinette's combative Mary, operating with verbal guns blazing, makes us feel sorry for Lambert's conciliatory Margaret, bewildered by her sister's mean streak, at least until Mary finally lets her guard down enough to show us the hurt beneath the anger. Margaret ("the nice one") just wants her question answered: Is Melissa right?

Sutorius' Father Murphy is a quiet drunk with the intellectual heft for the fight but not the heart to destroy poor Melissa. He seems unaware that Mary has had a thing for him for years.

Green's Melissa (she of the "Mission: Impossible" cell phone ringtone) has all the maddening pre-programmed answers except the one that matters most to her: where will she find a husband?

Adams has a way with entertaining dialogue, and there are many laughs in this script. What it lacks is originality and



(l-r) Mikel Sarah Lambert as Margaret and Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa in the West Coast Premiere of Evan Smith's 'The Savannah Disputation,' at The Old Globe, through Sunday, Nov. 1.

CREDIT: CRAIG SCHWARTZ

depth. Adams' point seems to be that no one has all the answers, but this hardly seems to need restatement.

The Savannah Disputation plays through Sunday, Nov. 1, at the Old Globe Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art. Shows Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinee Saturday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.

'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'

George and Martha are back with their harrowing brand of verbal humiliation and psychological warfare and that silly little song about Virginia Woolf.

Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* plays through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre, directed by Shana Wride.

In a small New England town, history professor George (Dale Morris) and his wife Martha (Glynn Bedington) return home after a faculty party given by Martha's father, the university president.

It's 2 a.m., and George is settling happily into a drink when Martha announces she's invited new biology prof Nick (Tyler Herdklotz) and his mousy wife Honey (Kelly Iverson) over for a nightcap. Little do they know what's in store.



Tyler Herdklotz and Kelly Iverson star in Edward Albee's 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre

George and Martha have a toxic marriage characterized by Martha's disdain for George's lack of ambition and George's hatred for the humiliation she regularly heaps on him. But they are bound for life in a sick relationship that unnerves us but works, in some strange way, for them.

Over the course of a liquored-up evening, psyches will be laid bare, painful secrets revealed and mocked, even a longstanding unspoken fantasy between George and Martha will be exposed.

It's a disturbing but exhilarating evening of theater when it's done right, and Compass does it justice, starting with Adam Lindsay's terrific set design and period props.

Bedington's Martha is a bit of a snarling tiger, ready to leap on anything weaker than she – and that includes everyone in this room. But for all the viciousness and anger, her vulnerabilities are palpable. She desperately wants something she knows she'll never have, and we can feel it.

Morris' George has managed to survive Martha somehow, but it seems he's shrunk a little in stature with every furious outburst. But watch out – this seeming puppy dog still has teeth that can rip psychological flesh.

Herdklotz does a splendid job with Nick, playing him a bit stronger than is usually the case. He has to walk a tightrope, trying to maintain his dignity while not

insulting the president's daughter.

Iverson is excellent in the badly underwritten part of Honey. She is the innocent and diffident little wifey, seriously outclassed in this pool of sharks.

Bravo, Compass, for doing justice to this American classic.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? plays through Saturday, Oct. 24, at Compass Theatre. Shows Thursday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 619-688-9210 or visit www.CompassTheatre.com.

'Creditors'

Creditors is a perverse little three-person piece about toxic love relationships, the urge to destroy and the need to possess. It was written in 1888, the same year as his much more famous *Miss Julie*; in fact, they were originally

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Test Your Faith In 'The Savannah Disputation'

Posted by [Jonathan Young](#) on Thursday, October 1, 2009 · [Leave a Comment](#)



Family beliefs leads to a religious showdown in [The Savannah Disputation](#), opening Oct. 1 at [The Old Globe](#) Arena Stage.

The Savannah Disputation is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a religious shakedown and a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith.

The cast of *The Savannah Disputation* features Kimberly Parker Green (Melissa), Mikel Sarah Lambert (Margaret), Nancy Robinette (Mary) and James Sutorius (Father Murphy).

Evan Smith's *The Savannah Disputation* enjoyed a successful run at [New York's Playwrights Horizons](#) in 2009, as did his previous plays, *Psych* and *The Uneasy Chair*.

The Savannah Disputation

Presented by The Old Globe

Oct. 1 – Nov. 1

Tickets: \$29-\$62

The Old Globe, 1363 Old Globe Way (In Balboa Park)

Box Office: (619) 23-GLOBE [234-5623]

Online: www.TheOldGlobe.org

RANCHO BERNADO NEWS JOURNAL

October 1, 2009

The Week's Best Bets

Old Globe's 'Disputation'



The **Old Globe Theater** presents "**The Savannah Disputation**," at its Arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art Oct. 1 through Nov. 1. The work is a comedy about two sisters whose lives are upended after one of them welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home. The play features Kimberly Parker Green, shown here, as Melissa. Tickets (\$29 to \$62) can be purchased at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by phone at 619-234-5623.

Experience 'Amazon' in Imax



Get a close-up view of the inhabitants that live along the mightiest river of the world with "**Amazon**," the newest Imax film at the **Reuben H. Fleet Science Center** in Balboa Park. The 1997 Oscar-nominated film tells the story of Dr. Mark Plotkin, an real-life ethnobotanist, who studies cultures and plants. He travels along the river and meets a fictional shaman from the Andes. Admission is \$14.50 for adults, \$11.75 for juniors and senior. For more information, go to www.rhfleet.org.

POWAY NEWS CHIEFTAIN

October 1, 2009

The Week's Best Bets

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PRESIDIO SENTINEL

October 2009

"The Savannah Disputation" is a contemporary comedy about two Catholic spinsters: the good-natured, sometimes susceptible Margaret and the no-nonsense, always spirited Mary. When Margaret welcomes a door-to-door Pentecostal missionary into their home her conviction begins to waver. Mary quickly hatches a plan to bring her sister back into the fold by inviting their unsuspecting parish priest to dinner, leading to a theological showdown about the true meaning of faith.

The cast features Kimberly Parker Green (Melissa), Nancy Robinette (Mary), Robin Pearson Rose (Margaret) and James Sutorius (Father Murphy).

The creative team includes Deb O (Scenic Design), Judith Dolan (Costume Design), Alan Burrett (Lighting Design), Paul Peterson (Sound Design) and Anjee Nero (Stage Manager).

Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

The Old Globe is located in San Diego's Balboa Park at 1363 Old Globe Way. There are numerous free parking lots available throughout the park. Valet parking is also available (\$10). For additional parking information visit www.BalboaPark.org.

Old Globe Theatre

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto announced the cast and creative team for the West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's comedy, "The Savannah Disputation." Directed by Kim Rubinstein, "The Savannah Disputation" will run in the Globe's Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium through Nov. 1, 2009. Tickets can be purchased online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Box Office.

SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL TIMES

September 16, 2009 YU YU

"The Savannah Disputation" 「サバンナ ディスピューテーション」

ディナー席で展開するカトリック教義をめぐる論争／E・スミスの喜劇

⑤ 姉マリーと妹マーガレットは敬けんなローマカトリック教会の信者。2人が暮らす家にペンテコステ派の伝道師メリッサが訪ねてくる。姉のマリーは「今まで救済を受けたことがありますか？」と問いかける若き伝道師を丁寧に且つ冷淡に追い払う。再びメリッサが姿を現わし、今度はマーガレットが対応するが、マリーの反感を買い、別の機会を求めるように告げる。そして、再度やって来たメリッサをマーガレットが居間に迎える。彼女はカトリックの教義について延々と説教を聞くうちに、自らの宗教心が揺らいでくる。

⑥ 信仰に疑問を抱き始めた妹を救うため、マリーはディナーパーティーを開く。姉妹が信頼する神父マーフィーを招待して、メリッサへの反撃を企んでいたが…。4人の登場人物が神、聖書、救済などをテーマにして、宗教的論争を繰り広げるコメディ。2007年にシカゴで初演を迎えたエヴァン・スミスによる戯曲。

⑦ THE GLOBE THEATRES (Old Globe Theatre), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255 (T)。期間—9/26(土)～11/1(日)。上演—火・水曜：7pm、木・金曜：8pm、土曜：2pm & 8pm、日曜：2pm & 7pm。チケット—\$29～\$62。

<http://www.oldglobe.org>



The Savannah Disputation / The Old Globe

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

October 29, 2009

NIGHT & DAY



Mikel Sarah Lambert (left) as Margaret and Kimberly Parker Green as Melissa star in "The Savannah Disputation" at the Old Globe. The West Coast premiere of Evan Smith's play runs through Nov. 1. *Craig Schwartz*

SAN DIEGO READER

October 29, 2009

CALENDAR



The Savannah Disputation