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**Timeless comedy still works**

By Frances Baum Nicholson  
Correspondent

NEIL Simon's "I Ought to be in Pictures" was born in Los Angeles at the Mark Taper Forum nearly two decades ago. Now the play has returned in an updated version, courtesy of the McCoy Rigby Entertainment series at La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts.

What fascinates most is the timelessness of the basic premise. Only small, nit-picky details had to be changed in this funny, heartwarming tale. Herb is a writer for television with a phobia about commitment and a staggering case of writer's block. Into his ineffectual but not unpleasant life descends Libby, the 19-year-old daughter he'd conveniently forgotten he had. She announces she wants to break into the movies, expects him to have major connections, and challenges all of his assumptions about himself, his past and his world.

Meeting Libby, whose drive and intensity of need creates echoes in her own heart, Herb's girlfriend Steffy begins to examine the inherent distance in her own relationship with the erstwhile author. Herb's life will never be the same.

As Herb, Gregory Itzin exudes the shock, consternation and frustration of a guy comfortable with a life going nowhere and suddenly forced to make life-changing choices. Bonita Friedericy brings a genuine quality, and understated charm to Steffy, wistfully yearning for connections beyond physical attraction.

The play centers quite solidly on Amy Brewczynski's Libby. Brewczynski allows one a glimpse of both the exterior toughness and the interior pain, spicing the whole with an ease with wry comedy which makes the play work. And a comedy the play becomes, despite its more serious moments. True to the Simon form, no situation becomes so bleak that a quick witticism can't help it climb out of the depths.

In the end, the play leaves one upbeat, hoping even if vainly that everyone involved has learned something from the encounters presented. Director Jules Aaron has made fine use of his performers, choreographing neat use of Gary Wissmann's design of a typical small Hollywood house.

The only jarring note involves the use of music, which changes from mellow mood enhancing tunes to classic crooners like Sinatra and Clooney with sudden jerks, often destroying the emotional image left at the end of a scene in favor of a need to throw in a tune everyone would recognize. The transitions are awkward, right down to unmatched keys, and pointless.

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With that exception, however, the production lives up to the timeless quality of the play. The only updating in "I Ought to be in Pictures" involves the names being dropped by various characters. References to "The Waltons" are now "7th Heaven," and stars discussed now include Julia Roberts and other modern box-office draws.

The situation itself is timeless, for the struggle between fathers and daughters, and between lovers and commitment, is perhaps as old as time. Rarely is it as humorous as when Simon gets ahold of it, as this play and this production once again ably proves.

### **Review**

- What: "I Ought to Be in Pictures"
- When: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturday, and 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, through June 17
- Where: La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, 14900 La Mirada Blvd. in La Mirada
- How much: \$35
- Info: (562) 944-9801

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