

Hilarity, Romance on Stage with Sierra Madre Playhouse's "You Can't Take It With You"

By Fran Syverson



You may have seen the movie, but now's your chance to experience on stage one of the time-honored adages of life: *You Can't Take It With You*. Come to the Sierra Madre Playhouse and rediscover the angst as young lovers from differing social strata decide whether their families can truly bless the romantic relationship. We have the socialite parents, and we have the madcap Sycamore family, whose antics regale us from the opening scene to the final bows.

Lovely young Alice Sycamore (Christina Diaz) is enamored of Tony Kirby, and he adores her. Tony (Justin Orkin) romances Alice ardently, and she wants to respond. But she hesitates, worrying that the senior

Kirbys will never understand her family, and that love really won't conquer all in their case.

That's the serious side of *You Can't Take It With You*, but the hilarious, long-popular comedy now playing at the Sierra Madre Playhouse spins the tale lightly. As the curtain opens, we begin to understand Alice's concern. Behold her family!—every one of them an eccentric in his or her own right.

Her sister Essie pirouettes about the stage practicing her ballerina steps, with or without her husband's accompaniment. Not too strange, except Ed's accompaniment is his accordion. Bessie Reisz's flitting as Essie hasn't improved much in her eight years of ballet lessons, but her enthusiasm is undeterred and she breaks into dance at every opportune, or inopportune, moment. Ed (Teddy Goldsmith) dallies with his weird printing press, printing whatever comes to mind. Not that he's a printer; he doesn't have a job.

Nor do the others living in Grandpa Sycamore's house. Like Grandpa, they've pretty much decided to follow their whims. Why slave your life away at a hated job? After all, "you can't take it with you!"

Amidst the chaos, determinedly plunking away on her typewriter (a hint that the play is set in the '30s) is the girls' mother Penny (Linda DeMetrick.) She's working on yet another of her novels—none of which has ever sold. The loud explosions issuing from their basement barely distract her. She's used to having her husband Paul (Phil Apoian) and his friend manufacture model after model of never-successful fireworks.

Stoically reading his paper, Grandpa Sycamore (Stan Kelly) seems bemused by much of his extended family's goings-on. He long ago quit his mundane job and has enjoyed life ever since.

The one person holding a job is Alice, who is remarkably normal. She dearly loves her family, despite their eccentricities. Yet she can just imagine how they would strike Tony's parents. She knows Mr. Kirby fairly well, as she works at his firm, where indeed, she and Tony met. Mr. and Mrs. Kirby are very conventional business tycoons as well as society leaders—so unlike the Sycamores.



Still, if there is to be any thought of marriage, Alice knows she must introduce them to her family. So the Kirbys (played by Richard Large and Dale Waddington Horowitz) are invited to dinner. Maybe, Alice hopes, just maybe, her family's basic nuttiness will be seen as creative and fascinating. She implores everyone to at least tone it down for the evening. Thrilled at the prospects of Alice capturing such a prize as a husband, her family agrees—sort of.

One can imagine the social embarrassment that ensues when the begowned Mrs. Kirby and her husband arrive for dinner—one night too soon! Each family sees the other in strong contrast to themselves. The situation is gist for quick repartee and rollicking laughter. While some of the antics seem over the top, they befit the theme of the play.

Good theater can, however, go beyond the humor to provide some deeper insights into ourselves, and this play by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman is no exception. It offers a tug-of-war between conformity and non-conformity. You'll enjoy watching as attitudes begin to shift. *You Can't Take It With You* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1936, the post-Depression era when people were ready for an evening of laughs. It has the same appeal now, when our society is experiencing financially depressing times.



Other folks adding to the outlandish quirks of the Sycamore household include Shamarrah E. Pates, James Fowler, Michael-Anthony Nozzi, Steve Holland, A.J. Russell, Tanner Morse and Jody Harrison.

David Calhoun designed his set to depict a middle-class family's home in 1936. A bulky console radio, a wall telephone, and a purplish velour scarf draped over a table all convey the era. There's a grandfather clock and a lampshade with a beaded fringe. The quirkiest item might well be the skull atop Penny's typing table.

Sheldon Bull is the director and Barbara Schofield is assistant director of the Playhouse production. Ward Calaway and Christine Soldate produced the play. Christina Harris is stage manager, and Anne Marie Atwan is in charge of properties.

Calhoun's construction crew comprises Jack Shipston, Karen Young, John Dimitri, Chris Varela, Estelle Campbell, James Fowler, and Liz Stoltz, plus Calaway and Schofield. Barry Schwam is the sound designer. Lighting designer is Kristen Cox; she, Christina Harris, and Karen Young handle the light and sound operations. The lighting crew includes Lygia Firmani, Yoon Jang-Hyun, Scott Harris, and Chris Pavan. Lois Tedrow can be credited for costuming, including the floaty dress Essie so enjoys for her ballet practice, for which Kimberly Olbrich provides the accordion music.

Tinker designed the poster art. John Johnson is production photographer and, with Calaway, is responsible for program design and layout. Philip Sokoloff is publicist. Orlando Mendoza is house manager.

You Can't Take It With You will be cavorting on the Sierra Madre Playhouse stage weekends through June 6. Curtain time is 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. for Sunday matinees. Admission is \$20 general, \$17 for seniors (65+) and students (13-17), and \$12 for children 12 and under.

The Sierra Madre Playhouse is located at 87 W. Sierra Madre Blvd., Sierra Madre. Free parking is available in city lots. Restaurants on Baldwin Avenue and Sierra Madre Boulevard offer pre-theater dining for every taste. For reservations or more information, phone (626) 355-4318, or visit the website, www.sierramadreplayhouse.org, for information or for online ticketing. Note that the online ticket charge has been removed.

Photo credit: John Johnson and Ward Calaway.

Depicted:

Top photo: Betsy Reisz (l.), A.J. Russell, Teddy Goldsmith;

Middle photo: Jodi Harrison, Phil Apoian;

Bottom photo: Mike Nozzi, Linda DeMetrick.