



Wednesday, April 13, 2011

Fancy Prose Style

A fascinating new comedy by local playwright Trevor Allen follows Vladimir Nabokov's actual 1941 roadtrip from N.Y. to Stanford.

By Sean Conwell

In 1941, Vladimir Nabokov journeyed from New York to Palo Alto. It was the first of the Russian-American author's many cross-country adventures and would come to influence his best-known work, *Lolita*. The trip also yielded a zoological discovery, a subspecies of butterfly, which Nabokov (an accomplished lepidopterist) christened *Neonympha dorothea dorothea* after Dorothy Leuthold, the woman who drove him and his family on the trip.

These are the events that inspired *Lolita Roadtrip*, a fascinating new comedy by local playwright Trevor Allen now being presented by San Jose Stage Company in collaboration with PlayGround, a San Francisco theater group.

"Comedy" is a loose definition. Like Nabokov's novel, *Lolita Roadtrip* is tragic as well as funny and deals with disturbing subject matter. In the play, Danny (Patrick Alparone), a teenaged runaway, hitches a ride with Julia (Chloë Bronzan), a Stanford graduate student who is retracing Nabokov's 1941 trip as grist for her thesis.

There are two more major characters: professor Drake (Julian López-Morillas) and his terminally ill, bed-ridden wife (Stacy Ross). López-Morillas and Ross also appear as Mr. and Mrs. Nabokov, as well as all the local eccentrics that Julia and Danny encounter on their trip, including a Civil War re-enactor (or is he the real thing, back from the grave?), a couple of UFO freaks and a relaxation specialist.

Essentially, though, *Lolita Roadtrip* is a four-person drama. The main players reveal details of their lives, often tragically sordid, through alternating soliloquies. As the story moves forward, their relationships with one another become clearer, and implicit parallels arise between them and characters in *Lolita*—both the young "nymphet" and the novel's predatory narrator, Humbert Humbert.

Now let's see a show of hands: How many of you have actually read *Lolita*? To

quote one of the play's funniest lines, "Don't look at me like that, it was on the syllabus!" Professor Drake speaks these words during a classroom lecture scene, and though they seem directed as much at the audience as at his students, there's no need to feel intimidated. Those familiar with the novel will find Julia's quest to dig deeper into Nabokov particularly enjoyable, but the uninitiated have a relatable figure in Danny, who is ignorant of almost everything that happened more than 10 years ago, and can only scratch his head in bewilderment when he eventually does read *Lolita*.

Lolita Roadtrip

Wednesday, 7:30pm, Friday—Saturday, 8pm, Sunday, 2pm, through May 1
San Jose Stage Company, 490 S. First St., San Jose
\$20—\$45