

# A Fine Romance in Pawtucket

The Community Players recently kicked off their 99<sup>th</sup> season with *Romantic Comedy* - their 369<sup>th</sup> production. TCP Advisory Board member (and publicity chair) Christopher Margadonna says, "I'm excited we moved our season opener to September to be in line with the Pawtucket Arts Festival. I really think that helped to be a part of the arts community in Pawtucket."

This cast of five seasoned veterans fills the stage with a nice mix of both tension and comic relief. Kiki Maples brilliantly portrays two characters — Allison St. James, the politically correct wife of our lead character; Jason Carmichael, and Kate Mallory, a floozy with whom Jason has an affair. Janette Gregorian portrays Jason's agent, Blanche Dailey, with plenty of sass to go along with her flashy wardrobe and wigs. Kelly Barry, who portrays Jason's heartthrob business partner Phoebe, grows from an insecure young lady to a woman who comes into her own, complete with perfectly timed comedic lines.



Photo credit: Bob Emerson

The play, written by Bernard Slade, is the first solo venture directed by Kimberly Rau, who was asked to fill in with very short notice. Newly wed in July, she was just packing for her 'familymoon' with her wife, Jennifer Rau, and five kids when she got the call — and accepted. She soon found the cast hard-working and up for the task, relieving some of the potential stress of the timing. She recalls, "My first rehearsal, I arrived early and found two of the actors sitting on the grass going over their lines. I learned they did

this often. The entire cast was repeatedly going above and beyond, proving that on top of their immense talent, they also collectively held a mind-blowing work ethic and sense of dedication. I should have guessed, with a title like *Romantic Comedy*, that the old cliché about the best things happening when you least expect them would be the take-away from this process.”

This is a period piece, jumping in time from the 1950s to the '70s, and the jazzy music reflects those eras. The lighting is standard (designer C. Richard Koster), and both are well handled by Angelina Manfredi, a student at the Jaqueline Walsh School for the Arts. “Our crew is largely comprised of Jacqueline M. Walsh (JMW) students, including Angelina, who is running our light board,” says Rau. “It’s so amazing to see a new generation of theater kids really getting interested in not just acting — though I know at least a few of them will be acting in *Seussical* with us — but also really being into learning about all of the stuff that gets a play on its feet.”

The setting is simplistic in nature, yet has a story all its own that’s close to home. Rau says, “The set is interesting, if only because I wanted a pretty strong mid-century vibe and that’s not something that I could easily capture from the places we usually get set pieces. So the desk, one of the chairs, and some small pieces are on loan from other theaters. The gray couch and another chair are from a cast member. The lamp, plants, record player, clock — most of the rest of it came from my own home. A lot of the ties Jason messes with were my dad’s that he gave me when he retired.” Additionally, a few of the art pieces were created by Rau’s wife specifically for this production. Rau wanted mid-century artwork, so Jennifer came up with the photograph on the shelf and the two paintings on the walls. “My big nerdy thing is the potted palm stage right.” Explains Rau, “We have two — one that is far bigger and comes out in act two to replace the smaller one from act one and suggests the passage of time. They’re the most picky ‘actors’ on that stage.” Costumer Pamela Jackson, and props designer Susan Staniunas were both open to input, which is hospitable considering they had already gotten ideas from the first director, who had to step down suddenly.

Rau kept the production true to script. “This play is called *Romantic Comedy* and on the surface, it’s exactly that, but the author has put a lot of nuance into it. There are a lot of callbacks in the third act, for instance, to the first act. Both Allison and Leo refer to some aspect of their lives as the ‘consolation prize.’ Jason and Phoebe both refer to the same incident in Chicago without knowing the other had talked about it. The characters are actually very deep, and connected, and we had a lot of fun finding those connections and discussing them.” She adds, “The one change to the original is when Phoebe storms off stage after their fight at the end of act two. The script calls for her to grab, I kid you not, ‘a small tank of goldfish’ and then storm out. I cannot imagine. What a nightmare. We changed it to a plant.”

In the third act, we see the two men sharing the stage in game of manly one-upmanship. It’s a refreshing display of testosterone as Jason (portrayed by Duane Langley), and Leo (portrayed by returning TCP member Tom Lavallee) spar off verbally to get the girl. Lavallee is elated to be returning to TCP. “I haven’t been part of it since 2012.” He explains, “I finally had some time to get back to the local theater scene after doing two national tours. What better place to be to hone my skills.”

*Romantic Comedy* runs through September 22, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30pm and Sundays at 2pm, 350 Division St, Pawtucket. For more information, visit [thecommunityplayers.net](http://thecommunityplayers.net) or call 401-726-6860.