

It is Useless to Resist Mira's "Resistance"

Man's inhumanity to man is timeless and 'enslavement', a many headed hydra with chameleon like abilities to assume many forms, is its ultimate expression.

Enslavement comes in many colors; the mellowed ambers of sour mash bourbon, the blue gray smoke from cigarettes, even the smell of money and the sizzle of lust. The unbridled pursuit of power, privilege and property are on the list as well. For most, enslavement conjures images of shackled African American ancestors, ripped from their native land and treated like so much chattel for centuries.

Freedom from enslavement requires unrelenting resistance, often without seeing the harvest of all of its fruits. Rosa Parks saw the distance to a bus's back seat on one cold, 1955 December morning, but her vision reached round and warmed the world. Dr King stood blind to the gun sight of a cold hearted assassin, but his collapse on a Memphis spring day gave flower to resurrected liberty for an entire people. Resisting evil and taking a stand can steady quaking ground and steel shredded will for those who follow.

So it was for a remarkable man, William Parker, an unsung American hero Mira theatre honors with the world premier of Richard Caulfield Goodman's play "Resistance"

Mira Theatre Guild (MTG) has resisted shuttering its beleaguered doors forever despite vandalism and theft threatening to fade their creative glow and signature marquee for excellent dramatic productions. Their choice to produce "Resistance" garnered allies. Resistance often does. The mayor of Vallejo, Anthony Intintoli, proclaimed February 23rd "William Parker Day" and Vallejo Music Theatre resisted being anything but helpful by lending significant performance, production and tech support.

You see, the story of William Parker is irresistible, although history seems to have resisted its telling. Let's go back to Sept 1788.

Article IV, Section 2 of the US Constitution gave more than tacit approval to slavery and The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, a usually ignored Federal law requiring the return of runaway slaves, reinforced it. However, in 1842 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* that states "did not have to aid in the hunting or recapture of slaves." The south was enraged and The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was passed as the "Compromise of 1850". California and Washington DC were free but grave fines requiring little burden of proof were instituted to arrest anyone suspected of being a runaway slave or assisting them. This spurred the Underground Railroad, a network of over 3,000 homes where "conductors" facilitated a slave's flight to northern freedom.

"Resistance" is a dramatization of true historical events occurring in September 1851 in Christiana, Pennsylvania as recounted in February and March 1866 articles by the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* who... "(wove the) facts" as reported by escaped slave William Parker, "into a story...(supporting) the... right of southern blacks...(to vote)"

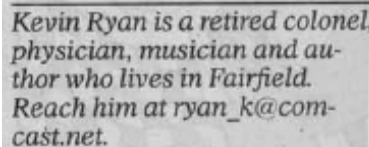
The story is told through the eyes of a sympathetic Quaker woman. Maryland slaveholder Ed Gorsuch, a US Marshall, and deputized whites demand to search Parker's home, a stop on the underground railroad. Parker refuses and a white passerby, Castner Hanaway, refuses to be deputized. A melee ensues and Gorsuch dies. Parker flees to Canada and a Pennsylvania congressman journeys from political expediency to principle by assisting in obtaining an acquittal of over thirty tried for treason.

The set, lighting and costumes are modest and the venue is without heat, so bring warm clothes. The production has structural and creative flaws and the MTG troupe and script would benefit from more rehearsal time and perhaps some 'workshopping'.

Nonetheless, I can not resist recommending that individuals, families and school children see this production and support MTG. Taken in the context of a laudable, selfless attempt of a multi-hatted cast, crew and production staff to resurrect storied MTG and the irrepressible importance of this history, the fixable faux pas of the production pale in comparison. We must always celebrate the lessons that illegitimate power cannot sustain itself nor resist its own corruption. Furthermore, resistance of oppression is infectious and highly communicable whereas failure to resist evil is an insidious and malignant disease.

So resist staying at home. Resist remaining a bit too ignorant of some very important American history. Resist not inviting a friend and resist not doing your part to help MTG survive and thrive. Families must see this, schools should visit and our ethnically diverse community will leave the theatre a little more of an American, a little more connected and a little more resistant to prejudice, bigotry and hate.

Three stars



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