

## **‘Earth and Sky’ Brings Mysterious Dark ‘Noir’ to Sierra Madre Playhouse**

*By Fran Syverson*

From the moment you enter the Playhouse, you’ve entered a dark, forbidding world—even, perhaps, an underworld. Before you lies a cityscape, all black and white. Midpoint, a wall seems to bisect the scene: to the right, stark skyscrapers blanketed with heavy cumulous clouds; to the left, a brick-lined, walled alley.

Your eyes are drawn into the alley as it narrows in the distance. What misdeeds will happen there? This drama is “noir,” bleak and cynical and despairing, a true departure from the comedic romps we’ve been enjoying recently at the Sierra Madre Playhouse.

However, when the action begins in *Earth and Sky*, we find a happy scene. Sara eagerly awaits a phone call from her exciting lover of only a few weeks, the only love she’s ever really known. But when David calls, she’s disappointed. Evasively, he says he won’t be coming to her small apartment for a while tonight, he doesn’t know for how long. Why? Well, an ex-girl friend is in desperate need; indeed, she’s made a suicide attempt.

Alas! David (Richard Trujillo) never arrives. The knock on Sara’s door brings instead two detectives with the tragic news of David’s death. More than his death—his murder! Kersnowski (Dennis Delsing) and Weber (Brian Francis) quiz Sara about her relationship, and begin to imply that David might have been connected to horrible crimes.

This cannot be! Sara defends the tender, loving, thoughtful man she’s known. And yet...yet...as the detectives point out, how well did she truly know him? Well enough, Sara believes, that she must somehow find the truth and clear David’s name and her doubts.

A determined Sara, sympathetically played by Kristi Leigh Snyder, begins to prowl through vague connections and darkened alleys, seeking tips. She finds encouragement and support in her newly hired co-librarian, Joyce (Lisa Steele.) Her path leads to Kenneth McLain as Billy, a bartender, who offers her some clues and an occasional shoulder to cry on. The police seem brusquely less than helpful, even when other murders ensue.

The plot thickens, as they say, when it also leads to Marie, a lady of questionable repute (Jessica Marie Smith.) In her colorful, frivolous garb, Marie is a bright spot in the drama, strikingly contrasting with the stark street scenes and trench-coated men. T.G. Cody as Eisenstadt and Thom Sanford as Gatz round out the cast in this sinister tale.

As we follow Sara in her search for a truth she may not be able to accept, we’re also treated to retrogressive flashbacks that trace her happy moments with David, from the most recent back to when they first, shyly, encountered each other. These scenes bring relief from the tensions of her travels through an increasingly morbid, hostile underworld—as do occasional flashes of humor.

Douglas Post is playwright of this neo-Noir production, *Earth and Sky*, which embodies many of the genre’s trademarks. The set is dimly lit, with lighting often focused selectively on the action. The stage is sparse: wooden chairs and table, a raised platform, stairs. In Noir, cigarette smoking is virtually mandatory, so our characters light up from time to time. It’s nighttime, and it rains and thunders frequently. The plot twists and turns, leading us to a surprising unraveling.

Jerry Morrison returns to the Sierra Madre Playhouse as director, having most recently worked in Helena, Montana. Andrea Dean is assistant director. Morrison and the cast dedicate *Earth and Sky* to the late Charles Andrese, longtime Playhouse artistic director.

Lois Tedrow as costume designer has outfitted the men in black garb, except for David in his white shirt worn during the flashbacks. She's chosen to symbolize Sara's single-minded search by clothing her in only one dress, pale yellow, throughout.

In the mysterious *Earth and Sky*, Kristen Cox and Barry Schwam play key roles as lighting designer and sound designer, respectively. Operators on both are Bob Postelnik and Steve Shaw. Don Bergmann ingeniously created the set by projecting photos onto the black panels, then painting white onto them to define the skyscrapers, clouds, alley and close-up buildings.

Multiple backstage roles are filled by David Calhoun as set designer and master carpenter and by Ward Calaway as producer, plus program design with John Johnson who is also production photographer. Curt Coover and Johnson designed the poster art. Rachel Lucero is stage manager. Properties designer is MacAndME. Jang-Hyun Yoon, Dong-Kyu Yang, Tommy Wang, Ha Eun Kim, Achim Covi, Chris Paven, Joo Yeon Kim, and Bawool-Kim make up the lighting crew. Philip Sokoloff is publicist.

*Earth and Sky* runs weekends through Sat., Aug. 9. Curtain time is 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays (dark on July 4<sup>th</sup>), and 2:30 p.m. for Sunday matinees. Admission is \$20 general, \$17 for seniors (65+) and students, and \$12 for children 12 years 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 Sierra Madre Boulevard and Baldwin Avenue offer pre-theater dining for every taste. For reservations or more information, phone (626) 256-3809, or visit the website, [www.sierramadreplayhouse.org](http://www.sierramadreplayhouse.org), for information or for online credit-card sales.