

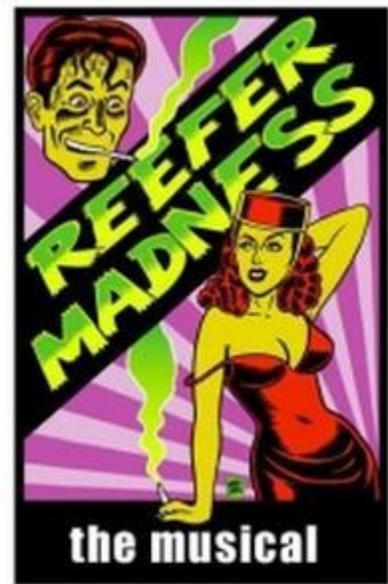
SOUTHERN FLORIDA

by John Lariiviere

Reefer Madness

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The Rising Action Theatre, Inc. and producer David Goldyn present *Reefer Madness The Musical*. The musical features a book and lyrics by Kevin Murphy, and music by Dan Studney. *Reefer Madness* is a satire of the 1936 American exploitation film of the same name. The 1936 film (originally titled *Tell Your Children*) was financed by a church group, who intended it to be shown to parents as a morality tale warning them about the dangers of marijuana use. The film gained cult status in the 1970s among pot smokers, however, who found it unintentionally comedic. The musical version opened at the Hudson Theatre in Los Angeles, California, in 1998 and enjoyed a brief Off-Broadway run in September of 2001. A Showtime film based on the musical was made for TV in 2005. The song "Mary Jane/Mary Lane", which Murphy and Studney composed for the television adaptation, won an Emmy Award for Music and Lyrics and is included in this stage production. Kevin Murphy may be a familiar name to fans of the TV series *Desperate Housewives* as he worked as head writer and co-executive producer for the hit comedy-drama from 2004-2007.



As the show opens it is 1936, and a lecturer is warning us all of the evils of cannabis and its threat to the American way of life. We meet wholesome high school students and sweethearts Mary and Jimmy. We also are introduced to the hostess of a local reefer den named Mae and her abusive boyfriend and pusher, Jack. Jack depends on luring innocent teens like Jimmy into the reefer den. Once they are there, and take their first puff, they become addicted to the demon weed, and are forever in need of Jack's supply of "the stuff." From that first inhalation it is a short trip to inevitable events such as the ones that occur in our story: a hit and run accident, theft, rape, assault, manslaughter, cannibalism, and the final descent into madness.

This production of *Reefer Madness* is pretty tightly staged, and contains some clever use of choreography and costuming. The actors certainly cast aside all inhibitions for "The Orgy" and its explicit nature. The ensemble performance is solid and even in both dancing and singing. The theatre has chosen to use tracks over live musicians, maintaining a decent balance between the tracks and the singers without using microphones. One technical glitch at the performance attended resulted in too long of a scene change, and an actress was left in darkness going into the song "Lonely Pew."

Bill Dobbins, who plays the Lecturer, does a wonderful job maintaining the commanding voice and persona of this stern, Rod Steiger-esque character, with one eyebrow forever cocked higher than the other. Each sentence is an ardent declaration of impending doom. He also shows acting versatility in brief cameo roles such as FDR. Larry Buzzeo has a singing voice that is a bit ragged around the edges, but he turns in a nice performance as Jesus in "Listen To Jesus, Jimmy." Nicole Niefeld as the battered looking Mae is best in the song "The Stuff" and in the closing scene with a well-placed hoe. Conor Walton, though overly presentational, is perfectly cast as the squeaky-clean Jimmy. He is well matched with Chelsa Greenberg as the pert Mary Lane. She oozes purity from every pore, right up until her first puff of cannabis, and even comes back from Heaven en pointe at the end of the show. Without a sincere acting moment in sight, this show is pure camp and fun.

Reefer Madness The Musical will be appearing at the Rising Action Theatre through April 11, 2010. The Rising Action Theatre, Inc. is located at 840 Oakland Park Blvd. in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. It is a small professional theatre hiring non-Equity performers. The Rising Action Theatre is dedicated to promoting and educating the public in diversity and tolerance for all people through theatre arts. It presents plays with multi-cultural themes, and works of social relevance. For season information and tickets you may reach them by phone at 954-561-2225 or 800-595-4849, or line at <http://www.risingactiontheatre.com/>.

Cast:

Lecturer: Bill Dobbins

Jimmy: Conor Walton

Mary: Chelsa Greenberg

Mae: Nicole Niefeld

Ralph: Joel S. Johnson

Sally: Lindsey Forgey

Placard Girl: Desiree DuBois

Ensemble: Meridith Cariski, Robert Cerveras, Katie Crawford, Joel A. Hiraldo

Crew:

Director/Music Director: Kevin Coughlin

Choreography: Dave Campbell

Scenic Design: Leah Brown

Lighting Design: Linda Matrone

Sound Design: David Hart

Costume Design: Kevin Coughlin

Stage Manager: Viva Sahar

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