



THE WOODLANDS STUDENT CENTER



'Picnic' opens at College Park Theater

The three-act drama, "Picnic," by William Inge, presented by The Woodlands College Park Theatre Department, opens at The College Park High School Main Stage Thursday, October 29 and runs through Tuesday, November 3.

The setting is of neighboring backyards in a small town in the 1950s. It's Labor Day weekend, and everyone is busy preparing for the annual picnic. A sexy drifter shakes up the town, particularly its female inhabitants, including a beautiful young girl who yearns for a more exciting life, her plain and bookish sister, and a moralistic but sexually frustrated school teacher.

College Park's award-winning director Valerie Labonski has assembled a unique cast. Each member possesses a diverse set of skills and experience. Many of the actors bring a wealth of thespian credits to Picnic.

Mrs. Lebonski has a theatrical background encompassing over 20 years on both sides of the curtain and 35 College Park productions and she was the recipient of the 2014 Dr. David Gottlieb Teacher Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Performing Arts. Valerie has tapped into this vast experience to bring the Picnic characters vibrantly to life on the College Park Theatre stage.

Review

The mood is set immediately as the lights come up on Act I and the audience is given its first glimpse of the family backyards, evoking an aura of nostalgia. We meet Bomber (**Alex Olesky**, a freshman student making a fine impression in this, his College Park debut) who has made his entrance delivering newspapers & to visit Millie, one of Flo's daughters. We quickly learn that Millie is the "smart daughter," always reading, always studying, and **Mary Hurstell** (a veteran of College Park theatre and chorus), shows great maturity and thoughtfulness in developing this character.

Other colorful family members, friends, and neighbors gradually are introduced. Quirky Mrs. Potts (**Syd Daw**) is the next-door neighbor—stage left—whose property encompasses one of the adjoining backyards. Endearing Syd Daw who has done a lot of work to have that age reflected in both her body and in her voice. She provides observations on life in general as she interacts with the rest of the cast.

Flo Owens owns the house stage right and rents out rooms. She is constantly trying to re-assure both her daughters that she truly loves them and does her best to be as good a mother as she can to girls with such different personalities, needs and desires. As Flo, **Arden Parker**, does a great job of portraying the panic that ensued as the situation slipped further and further out of her control.

There is a lot of talk about Flo's older daughter, Madge, the "pretty one" and the entrance of this character is highly anticipated. We have already learned that she has held the title of Neewollah Queen (that's "Halloween", spelled backwards – check it out). As winner of the local beauty pageant, actress **Sid Parker** does not

Cast and Crew of Picnic



(from top to bottom)
College Park Theatre
Department Head
Director Valerie
Lobonski, Syd Parker &
Mary Hurstell

disappoint. She gives an introspective interpretation as Madge.

What each of these women desire, however is a man.

Madge has a boyfriend, Alan. Will he marry her? He's going back to college in the fall. **Kyle Clevenger**, as Alan, gives a completely sensitive and believable performance as Alan.



But it is Alan's former frat brother, Hal, who grabs the attention of all the females in this story. Hal had a football scholarship to college, and according to one of the character's assessments of him, he could have been All-American had he just bothered to study. Hal has been hired as a handyman by Mrs. Potts and spends a lot of time crisscrossing the stage shirtless, to the admiration of all the women. He's had a troubled life and a rough childhood but somehow it is arranged for him to escort Millie to the town picnic. Alan hopes to take Madge out for a ride after the picnic, but emotions shift once Hal meets Madge.

T.J. Duncan, plays the lead role of Hal. T.J. gives a truly amazing performance in the pivotal role of Hal and has just the right amount of swagger and sex appeal to be convincing, justifying the onstage attention of the ladies. He is a welcome addition to the College Park stage. Kudos to T.J. for stepping up to the challenge of this demanding role.

During Act I we also meet the older schoolteacher, Rosemary (**Cara Ellison**), who lives upstairs at Flo's, and her younger colleagues, Irma (**McKenna Preston**) and Christine (**Sarah Schneider**). Irma has been on a recent trip to NYC and regales the friends with her stories. The roles of Irma and Christine are perfectly cast and both McKenna and Sarah give effervescent performances, bubbling over with charm and excitement.

Act I ends with a great musical selection playing on the soundtrack as Madge remains alone onstage, listening to a distant train whistle.

After intermission, Millie practices dancing solo. She definitely is feeling pretty in her go-to-picnic dress. She asks advice from other characters for making small talk in preparation for her upcoming swimming date with Hal while Madge continues to be frustrated by being known only for her beauty. Rosemary, Irma and Christine return after having attended a luncheon.



And we meet Rosemary's date, Howard.

Subtle lighting effectively depicts twilight, then sunset and finally, the night sky as Howard shares his flask with Hal. To Rosemary's great concern, liquor is against the law in this state and she fears word will get back to the school board, but she samples a swig or two herself.

Couples pair off to practice dancing until at last Madge and Hal find themselves together.

Rosemary has too much to drink and realizes that Millie's been sneaking too many sips from the flask. Millie becomes very sick while Rosemary gives Hal a piece of her mind, and then expresses remorse to Howard. She feels she's no longer young and asks Howard to drive off with her for the evening instead of going to the picnic.

As the others leave for the picnic, Madge and Hal find themselves alone again and shyly begin to confide in each other as the chemistry between them builds. They leave the stage together— but not to attend the picnic—as Act II comes to an end.

The action proceeds directly to Act III without intermission as Rosemary, beautifully dressed in blue, and Howard return from their date. Howard is in a hurry to get back to his out-of-town business but Rosemary wants to go with him. She accuses Howard of leading her on and begs him to marry her in one of the play's most poignant scenes. In this highly emotional sequence, **Cara Ellison's** acting shows a stunning dramatic turn which tugs at the heartstrings—hers, Howard's, and the audience's. And here is another example of Director Labonski's inspired casting in pairing Cara with **Brad Brickhouse** as Howard. Together, Cara and Brad create a special kind of onstage magic as the older couple, Rosemary and Howard.



After Rosemary and Howard exit, Madge and Hal re-enter, kiss goodnight, and then part. There is a brief blackout; night turns to morning. Having become completely absorbed in the emotional intrigue of each of these compelling characters and the situations in which they find themselves, the audience will find some reward in the final scene during which at least some of the complex dilemmas are resolved.

The production staff responsible for bringing the set and its characters to life includes Nicole Kapalski, assistant director; Laura Kieler, Technical Director; Kara Moline Student Teacher; Grace Bonney, Stage Manager; Blake Murrell, Lighting Designer; & Rebekah Fuller, Sound Manager

Thursday, Friday, Monday and Tuesday performances begin at 7 p.m. Adult general admission is \$7, and tickets for Students are \$5. The next production will be "Shrek The Musical," directed by Valerie Labonski, which will run January 21 - 23.

The College Park Theater is located on 3701 College Park Dr. For ticket information you may visit <http://twcetheatre15.wix.com/cptheatre15>

