



Mary Moore and Stewart Lyle co-star in John Angell Grant's couples-swapping comedy/drama, "A Package for Max."

## A timely 'Package'

Pear's new show shines a spotlight on Silicon Valley lifestyles

by Chris Ziegler-McPherson

**B**e careful for what you wish for. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

The reason these phrases and clichés survive is because they contain a kernel of truth, and a good play is an excellent way of exploring these universal maxims. "A Package for Max," which is being staged through Sunday at The Pear Avenue Theatre in Mountain View, is such a play.

Written by John Angell Grant, "A Package for Max" is a production that allows the audience to reflect on issues and themes everyone confronts in life. And even better, one can do it for the price of a \$20 theater ticket versus the expense of therapy — a fact the writer likes to point out.

The Palo Alto playwright depicts a week in the life of two Bay Area couples, Max and Patty Moran (Stewart Lyle and Mary Moore); their college friends, Maggie and Mitchell Madison (Michaela Greeley and Tom Ammon), and the fateful decisions they make regarding their marriages and their friendships. Ably directed by Ann Kuchins and produced by Pear founder Diane Tasca, "A Package for Max" explores the dangers of desire and the consequences of acting on it.

Frustrated by a failed business deal that would have allowed him to retire early, Max proposes to old college chum Maggie that they have an affair. Later, at the end of the dinner party which opens Act One, he suggests to wife Patty that they partner-swap with Maggie and Mitchell. Patty and Mitchell agree. The rest of the play deals with the ramifications of the couples' new relationship as lovers and friends.

## Theater Review

One of the strengths of "A Package for Max," is that, for better or for worse, many of us know Maxes, Pattys, Maggies and Mitchells. Grant's characters reflect the lives of many middle-class people living in the Bay Area; Max and Maggie are ambitious, never-satisfied entrepreneurs, always seeking the big financial break that will allow them to fulfill their youthful dreams. Patty and Mitchell are the homemakers and caregivers whose free labor makes Max and Maggie's lifestyles possible.

Happiness in the world of the Morans and Madisons is measured by the size of one's brokerage account; to work for someone else is deemed a failure, while retiring young and rich is the definition of success.

In true middle-class California style, the two couples complain of poverty while living a lifestyle of affluence. It is not enough to have a comfortable home, a good job, a stable, loving relationship, and happy children; Max needs a good financial package to feel secure. Ultimately, we discover his feelings of inadequacy extend far beyond his ability to retire before the age of 50.

The 40-seat Pear Avenue Theatre offers an almost voyeuristic experience, allowing the audience to watch four friends struggle to redefine their relationships to one another after having sex with the other's spouse. The acting is strong and credible, particularly the dia-

logues between the two couples.

The one puzzlement is the character of elementary-school teacher and house-husband Mitchell. As written by Grant and interpreted by Ammon, Mitchell has all the hallmarks of a gay man trapped in a straight marriage. Besides defying traditional gender roles by doing all the cooking, cleaning and child-rearing of his and Maggie's one child, he enjoys shopping with Patty, makes homemade pasta with perfection, and despite several years of marital practice, still does not know what makes his wife tick sexually.

Grant writes Mitchell's lines in Act One as if he were writing an episode of "Will & Grace," except this character is still in the closet. The possibility of a gay man loving his wife and enjoying sex with another woman is the one gender/sexual identity issue not explored in "A Package for Max."

The set design, skillfully handled by assistant director Valerie Pagen-darm, depicts the Morans' upper-middle class status. A comfortable leather sofa, a bar and an attractive easy chair comprise Max and Patty's living room — the scene of all visible action — although the actors use off-stage acting to good and humorous effect. The one-set play reminds the audience that for much of our lives, the most important moments happen in one room.

Theatregoers will not be disappointed. It's worth an evening out to find out what's inside the "Package for Max." ■

**WHAT:** "A Package for Max," written by John Angell Grant  
**WHERE:** Pear Avenue Theatre, 1220 Pear Ave., Unit K, Mountain View (off of Shoreline Boulevard, across from Century 16 Theatre).  
**WHEN:** Tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m.  
**COST:** Tickets are \$20/\$15 for Friday and Saturday performances; \$15/10 for Sunday performances.  
**INFO:** Please call (650) 254-1148 or visit [www.thepear.org](http://www.thepear.org).

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