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SULLIVAN COUNTY Democrat

The Theatrical Spectacle of "K2"

Jun 4, 2018

By **Bill Moloney** – *columnist*

K2 is the second tallest peak in the world. It sits on the border of Pakistan and China and rises heavenward to over 28,000 feet. It is known to many as the "Savage Mountain" due to its extreme difficulty of ascent. This fact is clearly illustrated by its grim statistic that one out of every four climbers never make it back. Most of this natural wonder is made up of solid ice with constant snow blanketing its every surface.

Imagine deciding to stage this setting for your next production?

Well, Director Brendan Burke takes on this very challenging project and does just that! Yes, with the combined creative genius of Scenic Designer Josh Christensen and Lighting Designer Jeremy Johnson, Mr. Burke fills the entire playing area of the Shadowland stage with an intimidating glacial wall. It is quite something to behold.

Playwright Patrick Meyers' story is set on one particular icy shelf about 27,000 feet high on K2 where two mountain climbers are stranded. After a fall leaves one of them with a badly broken leg, the two survive the frigid night only to confront the fact that they do not have the equipment to safely make it down to base camp.

Upon entering the theater, you are immediately taken with the spectacle of the set, however the truth is that this 90 minute play is really about these two men; two unlikely friends who come to a most difficult time in their lives. I used the word "challenging" already to describe the Director's plight, but it also exemplifies the performances of these two talented thespians. Conan McCarty as the married, physicist Harold who rarely complains and Justin Pietropaolo as the single, blustery district attorney Taylor create an improbable pair to be in this predicament. They are very different people. In this seemingly improbable relationship, these actors have a caustic chemistry that drives their hopeless situation right into our conscience. It is one helluva job these two do. It's one thing to portray your respective roles, but to do it for 90 minutes while having to watch every step or move you make or you'll really wind up with a broken leg is in a word: demanding! Quite a feat and well done!

Although this show is visually breathtaking with its splendor and yes, even an avalanche, it is at its core a tale of friendship and morality, of life and death and the search for something greater in life.