

BREAKING NEWS Labor Secretary Alex Acosta resigns amid furor over Epstein plea d

[News](#)

Review: ‘Gray Gardens’ find humor and tragedy in riches to rags story



DOUGLAS MORRISSON THEATRE Jenifer Tice stars as Little Edie in “Gray Gardens,” a play drawn from a documentary about a once-wealthy mother and daughter forced to live in squalor.

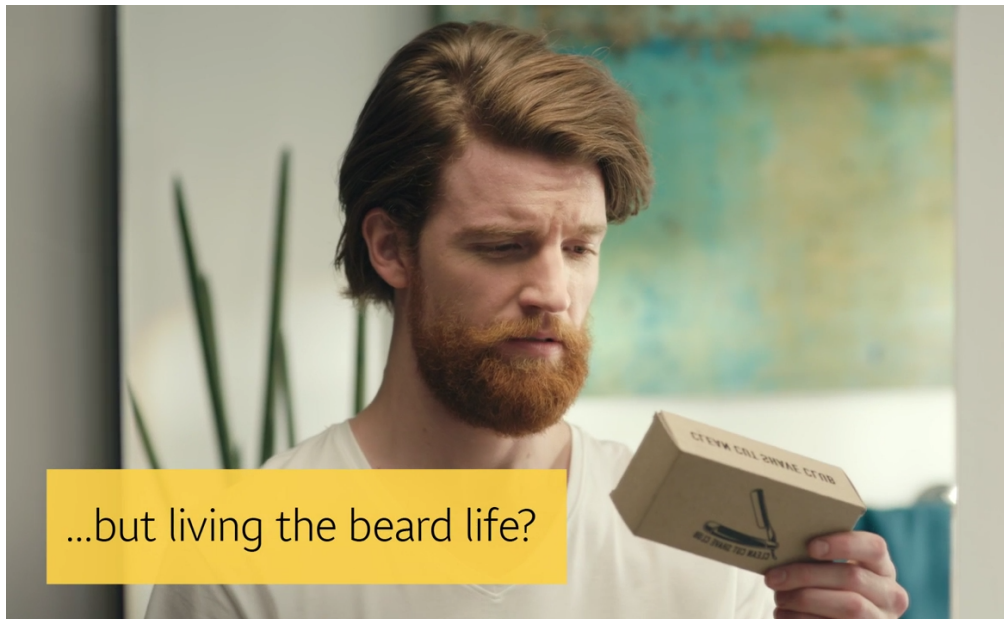
By **MERCURY NEWS** | themerc@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: September 11, 2012 at 7:45 am | UPDATED: August 13, 2016 at 1:42 am

When it opened off-Broadway in 2006, “Grey Gardens” had a bit of a novelty aspect to it, being the first musical to have been based on a documentary film.

Not that it mattered. “Grey Gardens,” currently playing at Hayward’s Douglas Morrisson Theatre, is a solid, engaging and often wildly funny story that stands quite nicely on its own as a piece of theater.

ADVERTISING



...but living the beard life?

While the show has as many toe-tapping tunes as a typical musical, the piece feels more like a straight play than a standard musical comedy, mainly because it has such a compelling tale to tell about a star-crossed American family that fell from extreme wealth to extreme poverty during the 20th century.

The bare bones of the musical deals with a mother, Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale (Jennifer Tice in the first act and Chris Macomber in the second, some 30 years later), and her daughter, Edith “Little Edie” Bouvier Beale (Melissa Heinrich in the first act and Tice in the second). They live on an estate known as Grey Gardens in tony East Hampton, N.Y., from the early 1920s to the ’70s, by which time the place has fallen into ruin, while the women have descended into poverty and a sort of blissful insanity.

If the Bouvier name sounds familiar, it is because it was also the maiden name of Jacqueline Kennedy and her sister Lee. Edith and Little Edie are aunt and the first cousin to Jackie and Lee, and the sisters, as girls (played by Julia Franks and Dax Franks, also sisters) turn up in one scene and meander through the house in the company of Little Edie, who, it turns out, is engaged to Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. (Alexander Murphy), older brother of John F. Kennedy and the man the Kennedy clan had actually pinned its hopes for the future on. Joe died in World War II, and the mantle passed to John.

Act I, based on both truth and fiction, takes place in July 1941, before America’s entry into World War II, when activity at Grey Gardens was at full tilt and Big Edie had a full-time piano player and companion, George (J. Scott Stewart). Action centers on the announcement of Joe and Little Edie’s engagement; things don’t work out as planned, and the seeds seem to be sewn for the decline of the mother and daughter, who were eventually alone on the estate except for the family’s longtime servant, Brooks, and his son, Brooks Jr. (Both are played by Reg Clay).

Act II, more historically accurate and based on the documentary made about the two women, illustrates the decline and eventual fall of the two in what is something of an American version of a Greek tragedy. The once-prominent socialites live amid trash and empty cat food cans in the ruin of the estate no longer fit for human occupancy.

There is much less laughter, except for the maniacal kind, in the second act, but it is equally riveting. In fact, the show is outstanding throughout, thanks to excellent direction by Michael Ryken, a breathtaking set by Emily Greene, wonderful costumes by Daisy Neske-Dickerson and extremely effective lighting from Michael Palumbo.

There is astonishing acting by the whole cast, particularly the principals, Macomber, Tice and Heinrich, who create characters who are both extremely charming and horribly creepy. Excellent performances also were delivered by Murphy and Clay, who served as constant touchstones with reality.

Perhaps the best part of the show is the fact that while it represents the new, more story-driven style of musicals, it also offers a satisfying and enjoyable evening of entertainment, firmly rooted in the musical tradition.

Contact Pat Craig at pjcraig495@yahoo.com.

'GREY GARDENS'

By Doug Wright, Scott Frankel and Michael Korie, presented by Douglas
Morrisson Theatre

Through: Sept. 30

Where: Douglas Morrisson Theatre, 22311 N. Third St., Hayward

Running time: 2 hours,
10 minutes

Tickets: \$20-\$28; 510-881-6777, www.dmtonline.org

[Report an error](#)

[Policies and Standards](#)

[Contact Us](#)



SPONSORED CONTENT

Mom Make Grave Mistake When She Takes Selfie In Her Daughter's Dorm Room [↗](#)

By **upbeat**

Mom surprises her daughter at college with a selfie, but soon realizes there is something terribly wrong....

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

ALL ACCESS DIGITAL OFFER FOR JUST 99 CENTS!