

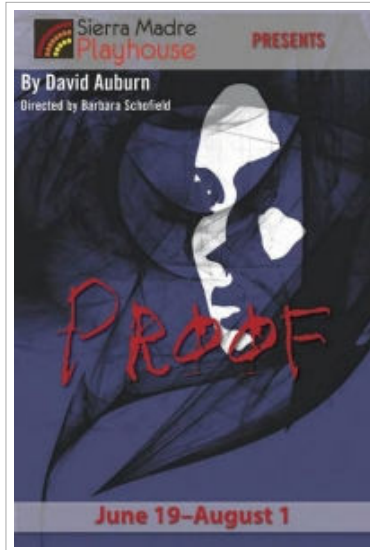
# AMERICAN CHRONICLE

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## Connecting the Dots

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There is a fine line between genius and madness. And it is often hard to know which side you're on. David Auburn's Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Proof*, delves into this search for answers at the Sierra Madre Playhouse now through August 1, 2009. Magnificently directed by Barbara Schofield, this four-character play fills the stage with heart-felt emotions and great understanding of a complex human condition.

Trapped in this conundrum, we find twenty-five year old Catherine, played with passion and brilliance by Alesa B. Gantz. The opening scene finds Catherine speaking with her father, Robert, the evening of her birthday. Robert, touchingly played by J.P. Bumstead, chastises his younger daughter for not utilizing her God-given talent as a mathematician. Catherine is afraid her reluctant genius might be a manifestation of madness, because her father, a renowned mathematician, had deteriorated into clinical depression over the last few years, and she feels she is going down the same path. The fact she is actually talking to her dead father might be a clue to her condition.

Working in Robert's office is Hal, the late genius's protégé. Hal has taken on the task of searching through the 103 notebooks Robert left behind. Both Catherine and Hal hope there might be one last mathematical solution left, scribbled out during a lucid moment, which would be noteworthy. Actor Chris Payne tackles the Hal role with both humor when he searches for the right thing to say to the intriguing Catherine, and depth when he must face Catherine's shocking revelation from a strictly scientific approach.

Claire, Catherine's older, estranged sister, arrives to settle her father's affairs and to take the demented Catherine back to New York with her. Laurie Naughton Okin handles the role with fire and energy, making the richer, more accomplished sister, the immovable object past whom Catherine must go if she is to truly discover herself.

Both sisters have solid reasons why they are like they are, so getting to the "proof" of whether Catherine is mad or perhaps even more of a genius than their extraordinary father, is riveting. And Hal has to balance his heart and his scientific brain to discover his own truth about whether Catherine could be more brilliant than even she thinks she is. Or does he readjust his own expectations, give up his dreams, and just teach?

As usual, the tremendous set created by David Calhoun is packed with detail after detail until you feel at home on that back porch at the house in Chicago. The talented sound designer, Barry Schwam, had the crickets chirping and the birds tweeting on cue. Sheer perfection.

The play can be seen at the Sierra Madre Playhouse, 87 W. Sierra Madre Blvd., Sierra Madre, CA 91024. Plenty of free parking behind the theater. Tickets: \$20; Seniors (65+) and students (13-17) \$17; Children 12 and under \$12. Reservations: (626-355-4318). Online Ticketing: [www.sierramadreplyhouse.org](http://www.sierramadreplyhouse.org).

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