

Double or nothing

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by DAVID WINKELSTERN
Versatility impresses in 'Murder for Two'

It was a murder mystery, comedy, musical and farce. "Murder for Two" was also one killer of a show.

The Williamston Theatre's version of the Joe Kinosian and Kellen Blair play had all the elements of a brilliant and complex production, minus the sizeable cast that would normally be present. Although there were never more than two actors on the exquisitely designed set, each of them played over a dozen characters.

The multi-talented Andrea Wollenberg brought remarkable substance and personality to a collection of distinct and individually enchanting eccentrics. As "The Suspects," Wollenberg slipped from age to age, gender to gender and voice to voice with ease. With little more than a two-sided hat/wig, a pair of glasses, a pipe and a scarf, she flipped into different and hilarious figures more often than a chameleon walking across a quilt with a tie-dyed patchwork.

Mark Schenfisch as Marcus Moscowicz was the detective who just as deftly interacted with the ever-changing characters. He dynamically dealt with each often-suspect "Suspect" with an unexpected energy that I suspect was drained after the ninety-five minute, no-intermission play.

Schenfisch sometimes ran off the stage to suddenly re-appear at the back house once to elicit a brief performance from an audience member. The spectators were often the laughable targets of both cast members. At the very least, the entire audience was engaged and connected to the wild and fluctuating spectacle that included adult humor, sophisticated song, and the occasional, fluid dance move.

Both players sailed through puns, witticisms, and word play that had me laughing out loud. Lou, an invisible character, earned chuckles when a potted tree representing him mysteriously shook when he was addressed. An unnamed hand that made a momentary appearance produced more laughs.

Squeals from an off-stage "cat" had the full house squealing.

The coup de grace of "Murder for Two" was when the two leads skillfully played a baby grand piano on stage, sometimes alone, sometimes together, but always magnificently. Only those in the seats left of the stage could witness their incredible hand manipulations. Wollenberg and Schenfisch expertly played complex scores while delivering complex dialogue.

The remarkable set designed by Bartley H. Bauer and marvelous props by Michelle Raymond added icing and sprinkles to the already luscious and layered theatrical cake. Askew and non-linear bookcases with specially veneered books that secretly lodged a will, hat, and a portrait, as well as other surprises I won't reveal, were uniquely delightful. A raised, curved wood platform with a studded leather Queen Anne's chair added elegance.

Back lighting on the bookcases, and spot-on overhead lights designed by Alex Gay were exceptional. A blood-red chandelier that was lowered to exactly above Wollenberg's head was impressive. Precise and clever sound effects created by John Lepard were another highlight of the well-lighted show. In "Murder for Two," the specific light variations and spooky sounds changed as often as the characters on stage did—and always on cue.

I credited the perpetual gesturing, posing, and complicated movements of the cast to director Rob Roznowski. His wrangling of the always-active baker's dozen kept the performance flowing and never tedious. "Murder for Two" was one play it wouldn't kill me to see two or more times.

"Murder for Two" 8 p.m. Thursdays; 3 p.m. Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays; Conversation Sunday Aug. 6 July 27-August 20 Tickets start at \$25/\$10 Students/\$2 Military/Senior discount Williamston Theatre 122 S Putnam St, Williamston (517) 655-SHOW (7469) williamstontheatre.org

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