

"Murder For Two" a Feast for Many at Williamston

Posted on July 25, 2017July 25, 2017 by It's All Theatre

By Daniel Skora

Though the invitation seems suggestive of a small, intimate affair, "Murder For Two", the musical comedy currently being presented at Williamston Theatre, is anything but. The number of possible suspects in the murder of famous mystery novelist Arthur Whitney numbers in the double digits. Whitney took the bullet that done him in in his own mansion, surrounded by family and friends who had gathered in celebration of a surprise birthday party held in his honor. And since Whitney used every one of his friends and family to flesh out the stories he wrote in often unflattering ways, motive is as plentiful as the candles on his cake.

Was it the ballerina who was afraid of having her affair with the famous mystery writer exposed? Was it the psychiatrist who was treating many of Whitney's guests and feeding him confidential information about his patients for his stories? Could it have been Whitney's wife, who had given up her career as an actress to marry him and now languishes in the shadow of his celebrity? Or was it one of the ten others who were present at the party?

Motive, though, hardly seems to matter in this show. Neither, in fact, does the actual murder. "Murder For Two" is instead a vehicle for some jaunty songs more befitting a carnival than a murder, piano playing extraordinaire (the only musical accompaniment in the show), and the remarkable talents of Andrea Wollenberg, who plays every one of the 13 suspects, and Mark Schenfisch, whose attempts at keeping the investigation on an even keel are doomed to end in failure as the detective wannabe Marcus Moskowicz.

Both Wollenberg and Schenfisch are accomplished musicians and do all of the instrumentation in the show. At one point they perform a rousing duet featuring some very fancy work at the keyboard. Schenfisch gets more time at the piano only because Wollenberg is busy creating those 13 characters. She is terrific as she makes her madcap way through every one of the suspects, differentiating them with



Andrea Wollenberg Photos by Chris Purchis



Mark Schenfisch

changes in voice, posture, and, in one instance, wearing a headpiece that's half gentleman's hat and half lady's feathered wig, turning her head from side to side to indicate whether it's the man or the woman speaking.

The musical has been around since 2011, always with a male in the role of "the suspects". Now, with Miss Wollenberg's performance, all of that changes. After seeing the show for the first time and watching



Schenfisch and Wollenberg

her carve her way through so many disparate characters in such glorious fashion (which include several members of a boys choir come to provide entertainment for the party), it would be difficult to imagine anyone else, male or female, in the role.

"Murder For Two" is a perfect example of the joy and creativity that can be found in live theatre when it's done right. And Williamston's production is as right as it can get. Wollenberg and Schenfisch are fabulous, director Rob Roznowski moves his actors well, and Bartley H. Bauer's set design using lopsided bookcases as a backdrop provides the perfect clash between refinement and screwy. Costume design is by Holly Iler with lighting by Alex Gay, sound by John Lepard and props by Michelle Raymond. Nan Luchini serves as stage manager.



Schenfisch and Wollenberg

“Murder For Two” clocks in at just over 90 minutes and is performed without intermission. The show runs through August 20th. Book is by Joe Kinosian and Kellen Blair while Kinosian is responsible for music and Blair the lyrics. Tickets can be purchased by phone at 1.517.655.SHOW (7469) Tuesday through Friday from Noon to 6:00p.m., by visiting the Williamston box office, or ordered online at www.williamstontheatre.org (<http://www.williamstontheatre.org>) up until 1 1/2 hours prior to the performance. Williamston Theatre is located at 122 S. Putnam Road in downtown Williamston. If you’re westward bound on I-96, exit at 117.

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