

‘Murder for Two’ – a mystery told in song and dance

Bridgette Redman, For the Lansing State Journal Published 6:39 a.m. ET July 20, 2017



(Photo: Photo by Chris Purchis.)

It's not easy to fit a musical on the small stage of Williamston Theatre. There's no room for a pit orchestra, and the audience would be ducking with every chorus line kick.

Which is why "Murder for Two" is a good match for Williamston Theatre. It's a two-person musical, and all the music is provided by the actors on a single piano on the stage. Directed by Rob Roznowski, it has the fun of a show where one actor plays many roles and the appeal of a murder mystery.

"What I love about it is that it puts together all my favorite genres: musicals, murder mysteries, plays where one actor plays millions of different roles," said Roznowski. "I love how the ridiculously low brow and high brow humor fits together really well. That's what is so special about this."

Roznowski had seen the show in New York several years ago and recommended it to Artistic Director Tony Caselli. When they decided on the show, they also chose to go in a slightly different direction than the New York and Farmer's Alley in Kalamazoo did the show. Those productions were done with two men. The Williamston show cast a man and a woman.

"It just brings a whole new dynamic to the piece that is touching and sweet and makes it a very different night in the theater," said Roznowski.

He said it is especially fitting because in "Murder for Two," (Book and music by Joe Kinosian and book and lyrics by Kellen Blair) the multiple parts played by the one actor are primarily female roles.

Roznowski said he thought having a man play that role added a campy aspect to the show that got in the way of the storytelling.

Mark Schenfisch and Andrea Wollenberg play 13 roles in this 90-minute musical. Schenfisch is a graduate of Michigan State University and became obsessed with this show while he was here.

He lives in New York and has done the show several times throughout the country. Wollenberg is from Minneapolis, St. Paul and performed the show there.

"The actor needs a really specific skill set for this show," said Roznowski, pointing out that not only must they sing, dance and act, but they also play the piano.

"Murder for Two" features a famous writer who is murdered in the first couple seconds of the show. His wife was throwing him a surprise birthday party and all of the guests are suspects — who end up getting their own songs.

"The intimacy of Williamston's space — there is nothing better than that," said Roznowski. "You watch an actor go through the physical and vocal changes that she does and you get to see that up close. That is really part of the fun and the virtuosity of the show. I never get bored. It's really exciting."

Roznowski also praised Bart Bauer's set design. He said normally the show is done without props and without costumes, so what they've done is use the aspect of the dead character's identity as an author.

The set is comprised of lots of books that transform and turn into other things — something Roznowski says is a clever design of the set.

IF YOU GO

What: "Murder for Two"

Where: Williamston Theatre, 122 Putnam Street, Williamston

When: Now through Aug. 20, 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 3 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays

Tickets: \$25 through \$30, www.williamstontheatre.org, (517)655-SHOW

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