

Encore

Monmouth's adult farce a risqué 'sidesplitter'

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MONMOUTH — Pandemonium reigns from start to finish in a hilariously risqué production of “What the Butler Saw,” the latest summer repertory production of Theater at Monmouth.

It’s a fiercely satirical British sex farce that skirts the bounds of propriety with clever twists of dialogue and some just-barely-short-of-shocking scenes.

The TAM cast of “What the Butler Saw” sets a frantic pace throughout playwright Joe Orton’s groundbreaking work of modern comedy.

James Noel Hoban portrays Dr. Prentice, a hedonistic psychiatrist who attempts to seduce an applicant for a job as his secretary, played by Anna Doyle. The doctor struggles to maintain a rickety semblance of professionalism as a rotation of misplaced clothing leads to some complicated cross-dressing, gender confusion and mistaken identities.

Further convolutions of the plot involve the untimely appearances of Mrs. Prentiss (Denise Cormier), Dr. Rance, who is a government inspector (Mark S. Cartier), a policeman (Max Waszak), and a uniformed hotel page (Graham Emmons).

The comedic performances of each actor is outstanding. In turn, their characters deal with a variety of outrageous situations. The play delivers some blistering satire of sexual deviation and psychological exploitation in a style that will be enjoyed by fans of British TV’s quirky “Monty Python” or the licentious comedy of Benny Hill.

Waszak gives a sidesplitting portrayal of a proper British policeman who winds up in women’s clothing. Equally well played is Emmon’s role of the hotel page who is out to blackmail Mrs. Prentiss over an illicit encounter at the Station Hotel. Even Mrs. Prentiss, who is quick to condemn her husband’s adulterous tendencies, finds herself in under-dressed circumstances.

Cartier’s official investigation of the clinic and Hoban’s frantic attempts to conceal the furtive activities are perfectly played. These two are the only members of the six-actor cast who keep their own clothes on.

“What the Butler Saw” takes place in the consulting room of the private psychiatric clinic run by Dr. Prentiss. The set, designed by Dan Bilodeau, consists of numerous doors — a feature of countless farces — and the cast makes hectic use of them in this side-splitting romp.

Costumes are by Kathleen P. Brown, lights by Cecilia Durbin and sound by Rew Tippin.

In his program notes, director Brian P. Allen says, “Trust and familiarity among the cast are necessary in order to make the split-second timing work.” The cast accomplishes this brilliantly.

Although “What the Butler Saw” has appalled and enraged some of its audiences, Allen said “it is considered a contemporary classic.” TAM presents a wild and wacky production of this adult-oriented comedy that should not offend audiences who are aware of its content.

TAM repertory performances of “What the Butler Saw” at Monmouth’s Cumston Hall are scheduled for Aug. 8, 15 and 19 at 7:30 p.m.; Aug. 9, 10 and 22 at 1 p.m.; and Aug. 17 at 7 p.m. with a post-show talk.

Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$30. Discounts available for groups of 10 or more.

For reservations call the TAM box office at 933-9999 or visit the website at www.theateratmonmouth.org.