

Encore

TAM's Sherlock Holmes spoof is hilarious

David A. Sargent / Special to the Sun Journal

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MONMOUTH -- Yes, I'm afraid it's just as they say. Theater critics are prone to hallucinations. The proof is all there, as clear as can be, in the Theater at Monmouth production of "The Real Inspector Hound."

How else can a dead body almost in the middle of the stage, yet totally unnoticed, be explained?

The TAM cast delivers an uproarious interpretation of playwright Tom Stoppard's comedy. From witty dialogue to hilarious physical comedy and unimaginably tangled plot, "The Real Inspector Hound" is a real summer theater delight.

As the play opens, rival critics Birdboot and Moon are, for all intents and purposes, part of the Cumston Hall audience watching a typically-British mystery. According to frequent police bulletins on the radio, a madman is in the vicinity of Muldoon Manor. It's a fog-bound, isolated and practically inaccessible estate, yet people keep popping in.

Two veteran TAM actors play the critics. Bill Van Horn (13th season and associate artistic director) is Birdboot, an egotistical womanizer. Mark S. Cartier (19th season) is Moon, who is filling in for another critic, Higgs. As this parody of a play-within-a-play gets going, the odd assemblage of residents and guests at the manor reveal varying degrees of suspicious behavior.

Matthew Arbour, third season with TAM, directed this fast-paced and very satisfying production of "Hound." In his program notes, Arbour emphasizes that Tom Stoppard's play gives the audience "a breathtaking balancing act at the intersection of 'reality' and 'fiction'."

Stoppard, is a prolific British writer with award-winning works for radio, TV, film and stage. He is known for works that explore philosophy and theatrical boundaries of plot and word-play.

Actors in the parodied parlor mystery set up a hilarious situation that draws Birdboot and Moon into their melodramatic world and, ultimately, to an astonishing conclusion.

Janis Stevens, 14-year TAM veteran, plays Mrs. Drudge, the maid, to frumpy perfection.

Jordan Coughtry, first season, portrays handsome Simon Gascoyne, who juggles affairs with both ladies, and incidentally comes under everybody's suspicion of being the dreaded madman.

Nisi Sturgis, first season, is Cynthia Muldoon, widowed owner of the manor,

and Anna Doyle, third season, is Felicity, the young and attractive acquaintance of Gascoyne (in the parody play) and Birdboot in the “real” world.

Michael Dix Thomas, second season, is Major Magnus Muldoon, crippled half-brother of the manor’s deceased Lord Albert, and he pilots a speedy wheelchair.

Inspector Hound is played by Andy Blaustein, first season. He’s an over-the-top Sherlock-type investigator.

The on-stage action goes into high gear when the two critics are drawn into the play-within-a-play. Birdboot’s déjà vu involvement with Cynthia and Felicity is hilarious. And the parody moves to another level when Moon finds himself in the same preposterous state of affairs.

A rapid wrap-up of the mystery settles the identification of Hound as well as “dead body,” played by Alan Estes, first season with TAM. He received a rousing curtain-call ovation for a remarkably restrained performance.

Except for Birdboot and Moon, no other critics from the audience wound up on stage. The Sun Journal reviewer remained in his seat, where he thoroughly enjoyed the show.

Up coming dates for “The Real Inspector Hound” are 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4 and Saturday, Aug. 8; 1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 9; 7:30 p.m. Aug. 14; and 7 p.m. Aug. 16, 7:30 p.m. Aug. 20 and 1 p.m Aug. 21.

“The Real Inspector Hound” is performed without intermission. The complete listing of dates and time of TAM’s six repertory plays through August can be found online at www.theateratmonmouth.org.

Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$30, and \$10 rush tickets are available for every performance to anyone under 30. Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more. For calendar and reservations, go to the Web site at www.theateratmonmouth.org or call the TAM box office at 933-9999.