

Gotta Go

Gotta Go is a syndicated, fine-living and travel column in Indiana magazines and Indianapolis-metro area newspapers since 2007. Elizabeth J. Musgrave gives recommendations and reviews on travel, wine/spirits/beer, cuisine, spas, hotels, theater, books, and more.

Sunday, December 30

Theater Review: Beef and Boards' Arsenic and Old Lace

Not quite sweet enough for Grandma, yet not over-the-top enough for horror fans. Resting in between is the genre called "dark comedy." If you have left the stage or film performance scratching your head over whether it is a comedy or deadly drama, you have just witnessed a dark comedy.

"*Arsenic and Old Lace*" has been on stage and the big screen since the early 1940s. The film version starred Cary Grant as Mortimer Brewster, the sweet nephew of two elderly spinsters, Abby and Martha Brewster, (portrayed last night on stage by Karen Pappas and Gerri Weagraff), respectively.

Beef and Boards Dinner Theatre, Indianapolis, opens its 40th season, as is its tradition, with a comedy. In this case, the classic story of the charitable ladies who just happen to commit murder.



Twelve murders to be exact.

Thrown into the chaos, Mortimer, played by David Schmittou, inadvertently discovers the family secret and attempts to transfer the blame to his brother. That younger brother, played by Doug Stark, happens to believe he is President Theodore Roosevelt. Yelling "Charge!" throughout the play, charging up the San Juan Hill (staircase) and digging the canal (graves) in Panama (cellar). Teddy is oblivious to his aunts' wicked ways and ... pretty much everything else. Stark clearly enjoys this role and takes to it with gusto, delighting the audience continually with his zany trumpeting, many costume changes and unwillingness to do anything not befitting a president of the United States.

Schmittou chalks up a great performance as the only sane one in the bunch, the straight man to the others' antics. Pappas and Weagraff work superbly as a team turning the two murderesses into endearing and adorable, albeit slightly bemused, aunts. Showing no clear understanding as to the immorality or illegal facet of their unorthodox bad habit, the pair has no problem showing Mortimer exactly how they poison the elderly gentlemen boarders. Putting the deadly potion of arsenic, cyanide and strychnine into elderberry wine, the two believe they are doing the men a favor by putting them out of their loneliness.

To add more trouble for Mortimer in walks escaped-from-prison brother Jonathan (Jeffrey Stockberger), not seen for 20 years. Jonathan, in an attempt to hide from authorities, teams up with Dr. Einstein, a quack plastic surgeon, played by Eddie Curry. Curry is hysterical in this role, taking the doctor, who transforms the convict into a Boris Karloff look alike, up several notches to a whole other wacky stratosphere.

Stockberger turns in a believable character demonstrating his ability to play more than straight comedy. Bearing scary features, even scarier mannerisms, and a terrifying pleasure in murdering people, Jonathan discovers his aunts are tied with his murder record: 12-to-12. And he is not pleased.

Bodies are hidden in window seats, dragged down cellar steps and pushed through windows, all the while Mortimer tries to keep visiting cops, his fiancée, and the neighbors from finding out the secret which will send his entire family to prison.

This comedy about death, delusion and deception brings out the best in Pappas, Stark and Curry, generating some of the best performances seen out of the trio. It's apparent all in the cast enjoy their roles and the north side theater starts out the new season on a high note.



About Elizabeth J. Musgrave



Elizabeth J. Musgrave
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Syndicated columnist of Gotta Go, newspaper and magazine circulation 216,000, as well as a travel writer, public speaker, blogger, freelance feature, copy and content writer. A local theater, music and restaurant critic, Elizabeth can be heard on 93 WIBC's Saturday Morning News Show as Indy's entertainment adviser. You can follow her on Twitter @GottaGo and Facebook.

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Bottom Line: Beef and Boards opens its 40th season with *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a madcap, zany comedy that just happens to be about murder - made even zanier by this talented cast.

Elizabeth J. Musgrave is a syndicated fine-living, travel columnist, freelance writer and photographer, and performing arts and restaurant critic for Gotta Go. Read Infused, her spirits, wine & beer lifestyle column, at www.GottaGo.us and www.FoodDigital.com and catch her as Indy's Entertainment Adviser on 93 WIBC. Gotta Go is published on www.Gottago.us, www.BroadwayWorld.com, an in print. Follow her on Twitter @GottaGo, LinkedIn and Facebook.



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