

UNDERPANTS REVIEW

Frank Capra's 1934 classic "It Happened One Night" coyly showed weary journeyer Claudette Colbert hanging her unmentionables up to dry before Clark Gable's wet eyes. The great directors knew that by keeping the underpants up, they had the sex thing down pat. It's all about the power of titillation through suggestion.

A teasing verboten glimpse, a sliver of silk, a flash of feminine finery and off to the races goes the most orgasmariffic organ of them all. It's between our ears-our imagination. Harbor Theatre's excellent portrayal of Steve Martins adaptation of a 1910 German satire heralds the timeless truth that the best laughs are at what is most ridiculous in us as portrayed by others. Laughing protects us from incriminating our own idiocy.

Replete with nimble wit and linguistic prowess, the script weaves a wicked satire and social commentary by irreverently serving up PG sex jokes, physical comedy, sophisticated repartee and musings on the working class, gender roles, anti-Semitism and the illicit seduction of fame. Harbor Theatre is up to the task as it hilariously presents farcical scenes and situations and double barreled double entendres in "The Underpants".

As the underpants go down, the curtain comes up on petty uptight German bureaucrat clerk, Theo Maske. He is spiraling into self absorbed senseless despair since his lovely wife Louise's bloomers unintentionally descended during a parade for the king. A gawking pretentious poet and a weak-willed ineffectual barber witnessing the fantasy of fallen feminine finery grow hopelessly enamored and more lust struck than adolescents hiding 'Playboys'. As the Maske household has a room to rent, the stage is set for comical vying for another leer at the unruly under things-one way or the other.

Both idiots show up to rent the room and their lascivious longings arouse innocent nearly virginal Louise to the reality of how truly bored she is with her passionless, cookie cutter life. All the while, Gertrude, a voyeuristic upstairs busybody, tries to fan the fires.

Sean Scofield confidently tackles the role of the arrogantly priggish Aryan fitness freak husband, Theo, who spews asinine blowhard idiocy expostulating "that only men should have affairs." This is a man who "can't change his mind because he would then have nothing to think" and who is overly concerned that his "(bland) job... and... (his wife's attractive) appearance does not go together"

Jesika Salt thoughtfully and impressively develops as Louise, his wife, as she hesitantly emerges from her shell, discovering both brain and libido. In time, she flowers having "acquired the skills of deception, lying and trickery."

Andrew C. Nolan embodies Versati, a boorish, hopelessly clueless gentleman poet so unbearably self-absorbed that he can't complete his seduction of Louise even though she's eager. Instead, the twit chooses to "pulse his pen onto paper" leaving Louise steaming in unconsummated forbidden longing.

Type cast, 'always on' Trevor Wright nails Cohen, the irritating, self-pitying whiny hypochondriac barber who is motivated by jealousy. Rachel Quinonez plays Gertrude, the licentious busy body, lust-by-proxy pushy upstairs neighbor. Sean Frierson rounds out the cast as the aging and Teutonic Kaiser-adoring dolt with a potty mouth when provoked.

Director Joseph Delorenzo swings the sharp scythe of satire deftly with mad-cap mime routines, site gags and smart blocking and pacing; the fundamentals of such over the top roles. Think quills and drills at duel. Farce is tough to do, physical comedy and satiric caricature is even tougher, especially for actors just starting out. Directorial strength and guidance is paramount and Mr. Delorenzo's imprimatur for convincing farcical portrayals and instinct for nuances is apparent.

Again the Solano Theatre tech team is superb. The clever use of a definitely non Germanic angular set where symmetry and order are distorted is perfect satire. Costuming is convincing and character enhancing.

I've seen London, been to France and now I've seen Harbor Theatres' production, "The Underpants". I loved them all. "The Underpants"- a timeless tour de farce about the 'panties that launched a thousand quips'.

Four stars

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