

## **"Bertha" is Fun and Familiar Drama**

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If you talk to someone who saw "Bertha, The Beautiful Typewriter Girl" last weekend at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre in Geneseo, Illinois, they may tell you they had a good time.

Don't believe them.

They really had a great time, and they just don't want to admit it.

"Bertha" is a melodrama in its purest form, a half-tempest in a very tiny teapot, a guilty pleasure for anyone in the audience with half a brain -- and you can't help but love it. The "Curses, foiled again!" story is not new, the stock characters are familiar, and you know the fair and noble among them will triumph in the end (as it always does, at least in melodrama). Still, watching the story unfold just as you know it will is awfully fun, and you can't help but laugh at many of the great lines and wonderful performances this show has to offer.

Chief among these is the work of Jessica Nicol, who is a fabulously funny Bertha. She has the smarts it takes to understand just how funny this wide-eyed, empty-headed ingénue role can be, and she works every single line for every possible laugh. Delivering a line like "Someone's at the door!" over and over could be tedious, but in Nicol's capable hands the phrase just gets more hilarious every time you hear it. Her performance absolutely makes this show - and just her work is worth seeing the entire thing -- but there are several other performers who also earn major laughs (and a few boos and hisses).

Jen Bucknell is excellent as Sally Silverthorne, a less-than-bright secretary just waiting for the perfect proposal from her favorite man, the hapless bank clerk "Skeets" Skinner (played by Bucknell's real-life husband, Doug), and these two are particularly funny when Sally and Skeets discuss what they each have in mind for how their married life will be.

As the hero, David Desmond, Andy Lord also earns huge laughs for his deadpan delivery and chisel-jawed portrayal, and he is another performer whose work just gets funnier as the show moves along. Greg Kerr is Daniel Desboro Desmond, the villain of the piece, and his cartoonish performance is exactly what the mustache-twirling role calls for. Steve Mroz also adopts a cardboard-cutout style in his "interesting and mysterious" portrayal of a character you just may have to see to believe, and it works perfectly.

A few other performers earn some laughs, though they fall short of the highly-stylized presentation called for in melodrama, but that doesn't stop this show from working very well. And though some of the audience-directed asides in the script would work better in a more traditional theater setting than in the round, we still get to hear and see almost everything -- which is plenty for a great evening's entertainment.

Go see "Bertha." Boo and hiss at will. Just be prepared to laugh and applaud a lot, too, because this funny play deserves it.