

## **'BusyBody' will keep you laughing, guessing**

**Quad-City Times – July 13, 2009 – Stephanie DePasquale**

"BusyBody" is a hilarious comedy about a dead body that goes missing and the nosy woman whose curiosity nearly makes her the next victim.

The play begins with Mrs. Piper, played by Jackie Skiles, discovering a dead body in the office she cleans. But by the time the police arrive, the body has mysteriously disappeared. Since Mrs. Piper also lives in the basement of the building - and has her nose in everybody's business - she turns into the star witness/detective and figures out who done it before the police can.

Everything about Skiles' performance leaves the audience rolling with laughter, from her cockney accent to her impeccable comedic timing and her facial expressions when the audience knows she's got a juicy bit of gossip that just might crack the case wide open.

Stan Weimer also does a wonderful job playing straight man to Skiles. Weimer portrays Detective Superintendent Baxter, a straight-edged, no-nonsense man who once took Mrs. Piper out when they were young. The duo shines together onstage, overshadowing the rest of the cast.

However, Vickie Reynolds also stands out as Cara DeMarlie. The 20-something looking for love, especially with Detective Constable Goddard (Cory Holbrook), also inspires some laughs, particularly in her exchanges with Mrs. Piper.

Nathan Johnson, who plays Robert Westerby, makes his first appearance onstage in "BusyBody." He holds his own until the final scene, which left a little to be desired. That's mostly because it's slightly unbelievable that Johnson, a tall man, could be restrained by Holbrook, who stands about a head shorter than Johnson.

On the whole, "BusyBody" will keep you laughing and guessing at the identity of the killer from beginning to end.

## **Murder She Thought**

**River Cities Reader – July 14, 2009 - by Mike Schulz**

To my recollection, I haven't yet been formally introduced to frequent Richmond Hill Barn Theatre performer Jackie Skiles, who plays the lead in the venue's current mystery/comedy *Busybody*. But it's nice to know that we have something in common. In Skiles' program biography, she lists Lavinia Hubbard in 2005's *Another Part of the Forest* as her favorite Richmond Hill role to date. That was my favorite Skiles role, too. Until now.

In this enjoyably frothy 1964 piece by playwright Jack Popplewell, Skiles portrays Lily Piper, an old-school Cockney maid who resides in the basement of a London building owned by business tycoon Richard Marshall (Thom May). As the play opens, Lily is on the phone in her boss' darkened office, informing the police of a dead body - whom she presumes to be Mr. Marshall - in an adjoining room. When Lily finally thinks to turn on the lights, she discovers that the corpse has moved, and is now slumped over in a chair five feet away from her. And after Lily leaves the scene and returns with the police some 10 minutes later, she discovers that the corpse has disappeared altogether.

Evidence suggests that there was, indeed, a murder on the premises, even though detectives Baxter (Stan Weimer) and Goddard (Cory Holbrook) can't ascertain where the body might have gone, or whether it was, in fact, the body of her employer. Yet with a number of suspects on hand - including Marshall's possibly unfaithful wife (Suzanne Rakestraw), his cagey business partner (Nathan Johnson), his unsmiling secretary (Molly McLaughlin), and his chirpy typist (Cara DeMarlie) - the loquacious, nosy Lily is determined to solve the mystery herself. Consequently, *Busybody* stands as both a traditional whodunit and the rarer who-did-it-get-done-to?, and despite Popplewell's happily puckish script, Richmond Hill's latest probably wouldn't be half as entertaining as it is without the blissful silliness of Jackie Skiles.

The role of the levelheaded, lovably sarcastic housekeeper is one of the main delights in British period comedies, but she's nearly always used for supporting relief; the character will generally offer a snappy comeback and indulge in a nip from her flask, and then she'll be off. Popplewell, though, had the good sense to put this unflappable, "h"-dropping figure front and center, and it's doubtful that anyone who sees director Joe DePauw's production could wish otherwise.

From that first phone call, it's clear that Skiles has her Cockney accent down pat, and knows how to employ it for maximum comic effect. (At Sunday's afternoon performance, she scored - and earned - dozens of laughs through cadence alone.) Yet beyond the beauty of her timing, *everything* about the actress' portrayal is right on the money. Skiles' warm, ingratiating ease and cheerful lack of pretense suggest someone completely comfortable in her own skin - Lily is a woman who obviously has fun wherever she goes - and luckily for the audience, the performer appears wholly unconcerned about looking ridiculous; in scenes that find her wrestling with a toppled chair or warding off an attacker with a potted plant, Skiles throws herself around the set with gleeful abandon.

Skiles is faster and funnier in *Busybody* than I've ever before seen her, and she's at her absolute finest when playing off Weimer. A by-the-book grouch with a serious head cold - his nose-blowing sounds like a man screaming with a sock stuffed in his mouth - Detective Baxter finds himself driven nearly mad by Lily's constant meddling. In this actor's hands, though, Baxter's anger is suffused with performance joy; you sense the thrill Weimer takes in delivering his exasperated tirades and deadpan put-downs. (After calling the police station to report that someone might be trying to dispose of Lily, the maid asks Baxter who it might be. "I don't know," he replies. "I'm just *hoping*.") Weimer and Skiles banter like a veteran comedy team, and their scenes lift *Busybody* from the realm of pleasant farce and take it to the level of *inspired* farce.