

## **'Desk Set' Full of Laughs, Promise**

**River Cities' Reader – July 2004 - by Jill Walsh**

Richmond Hill Players Theatre has done a very good thing. Instead of usual attempts to "wow" audiences with edgy (and, in my opinion, too brilliantly written for community theatre) scripts such as Steve Martin's Picasso at the Lapin Agile or efforts to appeal to the older generation with shows such as On Golden Pond and Driving Miss Daisy, the organization's current production of Desk Set settles contentedly into a much-needed middle ground.

William Marchant's script has a plotline we've all heard before: Brassy, vivacious woman overcomes obstacles in the workplace and outsmarts the man behind it all, winning her admirer's undying devotion and patching up any mishaps that might have occurred. And yet Desk Set is surprisingly appealing and new because of the direction of Joseph DePauw, who has effectively teased out every sarcastic line and outlandish expression from his actors to add to the show's hilarity.

Desk Set, concluding its two-week run on Sunday in Geneseo's Barn Theatre, takes place during the 1950s in the reference department of a television and radio broadcasting company in Manhattan. A witty group of women work in the office for Bonita (Bunny) Watson, who has an uncommon mental capacity for odd facts. Soon enough, trouble arrives in the form of Richard Sumner, an efficiency expert who begins planning for the installation of Emmaracs (essentially, computers) in place of human workers. And of course, the machines cannot compete with Bunny's skilled employees. Though scenes with the functional Emmaracs are essential to the plotline, the most intriguing moments involve the interactions of the office workers, such as the hilarious and believable drunken Christmas party. (I wouldn't be surprised if there really was champagne in those plastic cups!)

While the entire cast contributes to the success of Desk Set, Jessica Nicol stands out as the innocent yet bitingly sarcastic blond bombshell Bunny. Nicol ably handled each of Bunny's witty remarks with the quick timing essential to earning many laughs. Ann Morman played Bunny's office sidekick with gusto and feminine quirkiness, while Kenneth Ohr (as Richard Sumner) contributed a dry, workaholic attitude that effectively contrasted with Bunny's vivacity.

Finally, Desk Set restored my hope for some community-theatre organizations (Richmond Hill included) that in recent years have seemed to rely on the same stable of actors. This show boasted a wide array of ages and talents, giving the quirky veteran leads their much-deserved chances to shine and debut actors and crew members opportunities in small roles. This is a promising formula for real, diverse community theatre that consistently expands the reach of the productions and excites people of all ages, talent levels, and interests. For the future of Richmond Hill, I hope the formula computes.

## **You'll be amused by Richmond Hill's 'Desk Set'**

**Argus/Dispatch – July 14, 2004 - by Julie Jensen**

The Richmond Hill Players' production of "The Desk Set" by William Marchant is an amusing commentary on how technology can go head-to-head with human expertise.

Four women who are experienced reference-department researchers are suddenly hassled by a man who plans to introduce computer wizardry to their company. The machine purportedly has all the answers.

Jessica Nicol plays Bunny Watson, who is in charge of the research and who has unique ways of remembering things. Besides having a phenomenal memory, she is a real beauty with lots of charm. It's hard to understand how Abe Cutler, played by Andy Lord, can continually postpone getting serious about her.

The other researchers are Sadel Meyer (played by Stacie Brandle Kintigh), Peg Costello (Ann Morman) and Ruthie Saylor (Eugenia Giebel). Their personalities vary, but they are uniform in their ability to deliver the goods.

Richard Sumner, the boss's nephew who intrusively prepares the department for technological takeover, is portrayed by Kenneth Ohr. He strikes a nice balance between being a villain and a conscientious guy just trying to do his job.

The Lady in the Blue Suit (Muff LoGiudice) is a veteran employee of the department who stomps into the office wordlessly, flinging slips of paper onto the desks of the others. She's really funny.

Miss Warriner, the new computer's ``mommy," is played by Keri Cousins. She may be long on technology, but she is really short on general knowledge, and eventually the researchers have her on the run.

Elsa, the aggressive man-chaser, is played by Kate Anderson, and Kenny, the affable mailman, is played by Ryan McGivern.

Nick Hulstrom, Adam Klavohn, Taylor Giebel and Roxanne Ritter flesh out the cast with small roles well-played.

The set is the offices of the researchers, both before and after the robot invasion, and one of its unique features is what must be the longest trailing vine to ever come out of a flowerpot.

When Miss Emmy, as the computer is known, is installed, ``she" takes up a lot of room and has many bells and whistles. In fact, when ``she" starts to emit steam, make noises and violently spew paper, her ``mommy" runs away in terror.

The action takes place over the holidays, and one has to wonder if it owes anything to the millennium panic at the turn of the century. Probably not. The young and beautiful Bunny Watson talks about a night in 1947 when she obviously was adult.

The play has a recipe for getting rid of somebody: Write his or her name on a slip of paper, put it in an empty desk drawer, and forget about it. Never mind that it doesn't seem to work.

And during a flurry of pink slips, there's a rueful definition: ``A recession is when your girlfriend loses her job. A depression is when you lose yours."

At any rate, a night at the Barn taking in ``Desk Set" is anything but depressing.