

Richmond Hill offers right prescription

Quad City Times – April 6, 2005 - by Ruby Nancy

Richmond Hill Barn Theatre audiences might be more used to romantic comedies and standard dramas, but the play currently running there is not your everyday show. Despite being credited to a popular playwright whose work is all over the place, this isn't your ordinary Neil Simon play either.

Based on the comic short stories of Anton Chekov (talk about extraordinary!), "The Good Doctor" is a series of comic sketches which the director, Tom Morrow, has compared to the original "Carol Burnett Show." "The rich vignettes are droll," said Morrow in a press release, "the portraits affectionate and the humor infectious."

The series of stories concern everything from seduction and initiation to regret and the simple trials of attending a theater performance — without ever crossing beyond the territory of slightly risqué'. John VanDeWoestyne has the lead role as The Writer, and also functions as a sort of narrator and plays other roles in some of the sketches, and he says he's waited a long time for this opportunity.

'The Good Doctor' has long been one of my favorite scripts," he says. "I've wanted to direct or appear in it for about 20 years.

"The show appeals to me on many levels," he also says. "The greatest appeal is its (nonlinear) format. Rather than a play, it is sketch comedy. There are 10 different skits tied together by a common author. It gives me the chance to crawl in and out of several different personalities in one sitting."

VanDeWoestyne, who has performed in plays and musicals on other Quad-City area stages over the years, says he's also excited about another aspect of the role he is playing now. "It is the first time I've had the opportunity to sing on the Richmond Hill stage. That is a treat in itself." His enthusiasm for the show extends beyond the script and his role in it, too. "We have a terrifically funny and talented cast."

Lighting designer for "The Good Doctor," Jennifer Kingry, describes VanDeWoestyne's work in this show as "delightful," and a "stunning performance by a great local actor," saying, "He is all over this production. He shifts in and out of roles, from Writer/Narrator to smug seducer to cranky retired Russian admiral to a fond portrait of the Writer's own father with seemingly effortless ease."

She sums up his performance this way: "Each character is deftly drawn and brings loads of laughs, as well as the occasional tear, to the audience."

VanDeWoestyne's performance and the work of Morrow and Kingry are joined by the efforts of a dozen more cast members, many of whom have significant experience with comedy, and the show sounds like a real winner.

Your prescription? Make sure you go see "The Good Doctor." It will likely make you feel quite a bit better.

Richmond Hill Players present Chekhov by way of Simon

Argus-Dispatch – April 7, 2005 - by Julie Jensen

The Richmond Hill Players' production of "The Good Doctor," a dozen Chekhov tales tweaked by Neil Simon, is great entertainment.

Able directed by Tom Morrow, it involves a constantly changing set and a cast of 13, some of them playing dual roles.

John Van DeWoestyne holds the whole thing together as Anton Chekov, first seen in his writing cabin with a roof that leaks on his desk, which covers a hole in the floor.

In "The Sneeze," Michael Miller plays the man who attends a performance of "The Bearded Countess" with his wife, played by Jeanne Ellis, and winds up sitting behind the Minister of Public Parks, played by Spiro Bruskas, and his lady, played by Dawn Rena Rapp. He sneezes monumentally, splattering the minister's neck, and apologizes profusely.

Mr. Van DeWoestyne, supplying the narrative passages, first tells how the sneezer went home and died, then adds an alternative ending, "He inherited 5,000 rubles," a finale that will recur.

In "The Governess," Jackie Skiles seems to be taking terrible advantage of her children's governess, played by Dana Skiles, but it turns out that she is giving her a lesson in life.

"The Seduction" has Mr. Van DeWoestyne telling the audience how such a thing is accomplished, as he uses a husband (Eric Noyd) to do the seducing of his wife (Molly McLaughlin) for an accomplished Lothario who does the honorable thing in the end. He turns his back on the smitten wife.

In "The Drowned Man," a wharf rat played by Michael Miller approaches Chekov and offers to drown himself for three rubles. The ending is a real shocker.

In "A Defenseless Creature," Jackie Skiles is anything but that. She appeals to a bank executive played by Mr. Bruskas for money owed her sick husband. The banker is in poor condition himself, and her screaming, coughing, hysterical laughter and fainting fit exacerbate his misery. Mr. Noyd plays the bank employee who tries to get her off the boss's back.

Mr. Van DeWoestyne bookends the play as Chekov, saying, "I hope you all inherit five million rubles."