

Groom steals the show in 'Perfect Wedding'

Quad City Times – June 8, 2006 - by Ruby Nancy

June may be often seen as perfect for brides and grooms who want the ultimate nuptial celebration, but "*Perfect Wedding*," currently playing at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre, proves that this is a pretty good month for out-and-out hilarity.

Despite the title of this laugh-aloud comedy, the wedding day of Bill (the amazing, immensely entertaining Jeremy Mahr) is anything but perfect.

Waking late in the wrong hotel room after a booze-fest of a bachelor party, Bill finds himself lying next to a young woman he doesn't recognize — and things just go downhill from there. In addition to beginning his wedding day hung over and with the wrong female and in the wrong place, he also a determined fiancée to contend with, plus her bride's-momma-zilla mother, his joker of a best friend and a judgmental hotel maid.

Mahr is far from the only fine player in this farcical nonsense, but his superb work is at the center of virtually every scene, and audiences (perhaps both exhausted and exhilarated from mirth) should be totally grateful.

He plays Bill as sheepish, overwrought, resigned, tender, confused, terrified, shocked, lovestruck and determined — which covers at least part of the first act. Fabulously talented and blessed with what he needs to play Bill as ruffled and nerdy but still quite sexy — a combination which works much better than it looks in print — Mahr is in rare form.

His adorable depth in this performance transforms the silliness inherent in the work, maximizing the clever writing and wringing every much-appreciated laugh possible from his character's lines and from his completely organic reactions to the lines and antics of others.

"*Perfect Wedding*" is sharply funny — it's what a great sitcom aspires to be — and many other performers add to the mix of big laughs in it. Chris White is Tom, Bill's wisecracking friend, and his energetic, no-holds-barred performance is wonderful work. The kind of friend who thinks he's ascerbic when he's just unhappy, Tom is no brighter than Bill, but (like Mahr) White moves beyond phoning in what would be a perfectly acceptable comic performance to infuse the role with a zany wildness that is very funny to watch. Together, Mahr and White are a great comic team who make this lighthearted romp a truly enjoyable show.

Cara DeMarlie earns major laughs for her work as Julie, the hotel maid who cannot hide her impudent disdain for the guests she believes have loose morals.

A fine comic performer in her own right, DeMarlie lends so much to her scenes with Mahr and White that you keep hoping to see the three of them in the same "room" on the stage at the same time. Their sense of rhythm and inflection — and ability to feed off each other throughout every fluidly funny scene are the results of consummate teamwork that is too good to be missed.

While the balance of the cast isn't as universally excellent, they all manage to deliver all the right lines distinctly and at the right time — so that even the occasional recitation of lines (as though practicing a boring, hurried speech) has minimal effect on the laughs within scenes.

Yes, it could have been better, but — as is — this is a comedy that works just fine. First-time director Greg Cripple has turned in a fine first project, graced with sharp writing and a handful of superb performers, and this is an often terrific, thoroughly enjoyable show. Make sure you RSVP (you knew that corny line was coming, right?) for this "*Perfect Wedding*."

Simply Mahr-velous

River Cities' Reader – June 7, 2006 - by Mike Schulz

Jeremy Mahr may be our area's most effortlessly relaxed performer. There isn't even a *trace* of actor's phoniness in his line readings or physicality; there's so little artifice in Mahr's portrayals that he can easily fool you into thinking he's not acting at all. Mahr has a beautiful hangdog expression - he looks as if he's endured continual disappointment, and is prepared to endure more - and his focus is concentrated and imploring. Yet when he smiles, the warmth that exudes from him is a little overpowering; he acts like a man embarrassed to be receiving the happiness he deserves. Mahr is a supremely empathetic performer - I've now seen him in three productions since August, and for the life of me, I can't figure out how he manages to do so much while appearing to do so little.

As the flummoxed, working-class father in the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre's gently hilarious *Over the Tavern*, Mahr was outwardly gruff and touchingly boyish - a teddy bear in the guise of a grizzly bear. In the Prenzie Players production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this spring, he played Lysander with heartfelt emotion and comic panache. Now, in Richmond Hill's presentation of Robin Hawdon's *Perfect Wedding*, Mahr finds himself in a center of a zany romantic farce, and damn it if he isn't completely engaging - and, more astonishingly, *human* - in this show, too.

Hawdon's comedy (during its inspired first act, at least) is one of those bedroom-door-slamming contraptions that requires that its physical shtick and the actors' banter be performed with hairbreadth timing, and, playing a bridegroom who mistakenly finds himself in bed with another woman (Mackenzie Kerr) on his wedding morning, Mahr pulls off both the shtick *and* the banter with the requisite gusto. But what's completely unexpected about his performance - even if you've admired Mahr's work in the past - is how much you find yourself *caring* about his overwrought groom-to-be.

Mahr delivers punchlines with spectacular assurance, but it's his goofy throwaway moments that really get you: the way he nervously pats the shoulders of his fiancée (Dawn Rapp) when scheming his way out of trouble; his *faux* nonchalance while adjusting the bow tie of his exasperated best man (Chris White). These human details - and there are many more of them - cut through the playwright's glibness and, combined with the perfect sincerity of Mahr's expressions, give the escalating madness some context. In *Perfect Wedding*, Mahr has turned a farcically synthetic character into a marvelously complicated and believable one. That's more than inspired. That's *heroic*.

As fellow schemers, White and Cara DeMarlie (playing an understandably confused housekeeper) aren't as multi-dimensional, but are so freaking funny you couldn't care less. White, trading wisecracks with Mahr, spits out his punchlines with devastating precision and jovial confidence - one of his particularly energetic rants received, and deserved, opening-night applause - and DeMarlie is a thoroughly charming scene-stealer; you could ignore the rest of the show and easily get your fill of laughs from her disbelieving reactions alone. (With her low, dry voice and a comic deadpan to match, she's a bit reminiscent of Scarlett Johansson.)

Despite going off the rails in Act II, when a maudlin sentimentality creeps in and the expected happy endings feel tacked-on - as if Hawdon felt the need to wrap up the show post-haste - *Perfect Wedding* is a most enjoyable concoction (the first act's comedic intricacies grow increasingly, deliriously amusing), and Richmond Hill's production is even better than the script itself.

Director Greg Cripple displays true flair for the genre's conventions - the timing of the wordplay and visual gags is impressively polished - and the set, co-designed by Cripple and Angela Rathman, is cleverly constructed for the Barn's theatre-in-the-round seating.

Perfect Wedding is a terrific entertainment - the best time I've had at Richmond Hill since *Over the Tavern* - and it's blessed with a rather extraordinary leading actor. Performers are occasionally said to possess a light touch, or a sure touch; I'm beginning to think that Jeremy Mahr has a *Midas* touch.

Strong cast leads 'Perfect Wedding' through humorous mix-ups

Dispatch / Argus – June 8, 2006 - by Julie Jensen

There's never a dull moment in "Perfect Wedding," now playing at the Richmond Hill Barn in Geneseo.

Under Greg Cripple's direction, the time, the body language and the delivery of the lines work marvelously. It's hard to believe that this is his first directing job.

Another amazement is the mature performances of two young women newly graduated from high school.

They are Cara DeMarlie, who plays, Julie, the housekeeper at the hotel where the wedding is to be held, and Mackenzie Kerr, who plays Judy, the woman who winds up in bed with the bridegroom-to-be the night before the wedding. Both are totally believable in their roles, which involve identity mix-ups.

Both of the male leads are players at Comedy Sportz, and that's probably one reason why they are so funny.

Jeremy Mahr is Bill, the bridegroom, and his double-takes and flustered attempts to hide an incident he was too drunk to recall are right on the mark.

Chris White's portrayal of best man Tom is full of energy. His facial expressions are hilarious.

Dawn Rapp is bride-to-be Rachel, and she doesn't have a chance to look good until near the end of the second act, when she takes the curlers out of her hair and dons her wedding dress. She brings a lot of assurance to the role throughout, however.

Carla Stevens is the mother of the bride, and she sails in cooing about the "perfect wedding," hums "Here Comes the Bride," and over-does everything in a most amusing manner.

There's a lot of face-slapping where the slappers don't pull any punches, and worse bodily harm than that is promised.

Suffice it to say, things do not go according to plans, but the end result is probably closer to perfection than what was on the drawing board.