

Comedic 'Romance in D' perfectly in tune

Quad City Times – February 24, 2005 - by Ruby Nancy

James Sherman's "Romance in D" has a lot of the hallmarks of a Sherman play - including an appreciation of really good music, some sweet romance, a bit of Jewish tradition - and it has my favorite Sherman trademark, the gentle assertion that those often referred to as "seniors" have an interesting life of their own.

In fact, this romantic comedy is at least as much about its older characters as it is about the younger ones who are officially at the center of the story. George Fox (played with perfect panache by the velvet-voiced Ray Rogers) has a poet daughter whose failed marriage has thrown her into depression, and Helen Norton (the vivacious Jean Melillo) has a son whose love of music is matched only by the solitary nature of his life. After the daughter moves into a small apartment next to the son, George and Helen meet in the hallway of the Chicago apartment building - and the rest of their story is a delightful romance that is as entertaining as it is sweet.

The daughter, Isabel (Ashley Hoskins), and the son, Charles (Mike Skiles), also strike up a friendship after her halfhearted suicide attempt is thwarted by his smelling the gas, but both are as surprised by the romance that blossoms between their parents as they are by their own budding friendship. Faced with parents who have enjoyed long-term, happy marriages and have found love again before Isabel or Charles have had a real chance at either, these two younger characters commiserate with each other over their own bleak prospects - and their companionable time together finds them opening up each other's worlds to language and to music.

A cute little double-apartment, mirror-image set works well for this fine show, as does the technology required for the music in some parts of the script, but it is the wonderful writing and the work of the performers that makes this production so well worth the time of audience members.

Melillo is absolutely wonderful, providing a clear portrayal of a lively woman who is ready for a new phase of life to begin. Her energy level and emotional investment into this performance are high, and the result is warm, funny and fabulous.

Rogers is also a fine performer, with a smooth groove and a voice that could sweep almost anyone off their feet. As both a kindly, intellectual father and a charming, totally sexy man, his George proves to be a quite appealing combination - to Helen and, I daresay, to countless audience members as well.

Skiles is a good-looking guy who fills the role of Charles well, though some awkward moments belie his romantic lead status, and this performer shines most when his character is talking about great music or sparring with his mother. Hoskins, whose preoccupied character is the least likeable of the four in this play, has less to work with in the script, but she still turns out a performance with a number of comic moments.

One dual scene involving all four actors had some pacing issues opening weekend that hopefully will be addressed by now, and even that did not prevent this adorable romantic comedy from earning high marks for its sweet take on love's possibilities.

"Romance in D" is a wonderfully entertaining "half-hanky" comedy that deserves the packed houses it will no doubt have this weekend. Make sure you get a seat.

`Romance' chronicles ups and downs of 2 couples

Argus-Dispatch – February 25, 2005 - by Julie Jensen

The Richmond Hill Players' first offering of their 38th season, "Romance in D," is an unlikely love story, complete with a generation gap, but love apparently can survive in all kinds of growing conditions.

Written by James Sherman and directed by Kevin DeDecker, the play has 10 comparatively brief scenes in which to bring two sets of lovers together. One of the relationships seems to have a fighting chance, but the other is iffy, to say the least.

The "action" takes place in side-by-side apartments in Chicago, and sometimes the lines are antiphonal so the audience can keep up with two conversations at once.

Ashley Hoskins, a Davenport who hails from Louisville, Ky., plays Isabel Fox, an immature 40-year-old woman who writes poetry and has been dumped by her husband. Although her situation deserves sympathy, her petulance discourages empathy.

Mike Skiles plays Charles Norton, the hermit musicologist who lives next door to Isabel and is perfectly content to mind his own creative business making music.

Jean Melillo is Helen Norton, the musicologist's mother. She comes to his apartment every Friday and prepares dinner for him. Ms. Melillo brings a lot of warmth to the role.

Ray Rogers plays George Fox, Isabel's father. He does voice-overs. He's a charmer; especially when he dances with Helen Norton.

The younger twosome meets when Isabel tries to commit suicide by sticking her head in the oven but is so distracted by the loud music coming from the apartment next door that she knocks and complains to Charles. He turns the volume down, and she returns to her deadly action.

Smelling gas, Charles calls 911, and Isabel lives to fight another day. They're never together long, but they discuss things like "talking music."

Charles says, "If everybody could talk music, the world would be a better place. Words are valueless." That's when she tells him she's a poet. He quickly apologizes.

Isabel's father has a heart-to-heart with Charles, asking him to watch over Isabel for him when he leaves Chicago. This is not easy. When Charles knocks on her door, she says, "I'm fine. Go away."

In the meantime, the parents have discovered they have more and more in common. In fact, Charles discovers them in a compromising situation one morning in his apartment.

Their children are more cautious. Relationships involve the possibility of getting hurt. But over time, they begin to see that loneliness hurts more.