



WFRV-TV: We Are Green Bay

"The Drowsy Chaperone" (Peninsula Players Theatre)

"The Drowsy Chaperone" Rides on Humor and Flair in Door County

Warren Gerds, Published 7:51 a. m. CT July 26, 2018

You at some point have met a person who is so enthusiastic about his/her passion in life that you feel swept along in an overwhelming current. A foodie. A sports fan. A car buff. A clothes hound. A deer hunter (This is Wisconsin).

In the show "The Drowsy Chaperone," the person is enamored of vintage musical theater. His current runs to a kind of lust.

The rapture of Man in Chair (the name given the character) is such that he HAS to play out his fascination to everybody by having his imagination come to life.

When he plops a vinyl recording of his beloved 1928 show "The Drowsy Chaperone" on a turntable, what he hears is what the audience sees.

Not only that, Man in Chair is on the fringe of the singing, dancing and fanciful/silly goings on. He is physically a part of what he is hearing/imagining. And so, of course, is the audience.

That audience, to Aug. 12, happens to be that of the pros at Peninsula Players Theatre. Man in Chair more than happens to be portrayed by Greg Vinkler, who picked the show for this season in the first place as artistic director of the company – and had more than a casual hand in selecting the specialty players and creative team to pull off this colorful production.



The cast of *The Drowsy Chaperone* in performances at Peninsula Players until August 12. Pictured from left are Joe Capstick, Drew Humphrey, Elizabeth Haley, Jason Richards, Barbara Robertson, Sean Fortunato, Erica Stephan, Karl Hamilton, Meghan Murphy, Dena DiGianto, James Harms, Tim Monsion and Erin Parker.
Photos by Len Vilano.

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As *Man in Chair*, Vinkler breathes adoration for a certain style and flair for lite entertainment that takes heavy duty skill be charming, delightful and impressive.

Action swirls around a fluffy story, in 25 words: A star of the stage will give it all up for marriage, upsetting her producer and gangsters, but setting in motion a bundle of romance.

Being that the time is 1928, the mood is carefree (vs. what's to happen in the Crash of 1929).

Envisioned for the star is a gay wedding. *Man in Chair* says, "Of course, the phrase 'gay wedding' has a different meaning now." *Man in Chair* says that – and most everything – in such a way that the different meaning is inescapable in his character.

All of the characters are brightly hued cardboard, which is part of their attraction. They also are dressed to kill, with great finesse shown in costume design and execution. The show has a look, that of well-heeled class.

Aside from *Man in Chair*, who is present virtually throughout, talent in skill (starring) positions is often shown in bursts. Some samples:



Greg Vinkler as Man in Chair

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Erica Stephan portrays Janet Van de Graaff, the major star who wants to get married. Early on, Stephan lets rip in "(I Don't Want to) Show Off." The joke is, despite what Janet sings, she can't resist showing off. That includes a cartwheel, the splits, gag-impossible things and for-real lofting a high and brilliant note.

Meghan Murphy is another big-note lofter and stylish performer as The Drowsy Chaperone. Murphy's song, "As We Stumble Along," not only is a splashy showcase for her but a sensitive reminder for Man in Chair at the climax. Side note: The chaperone (for Janet on her wedding day) is drowsy because she is perpetually plucked – which is a tease on reality because she is floating along in an alcoholic haze in the midst of Prohibition.

Drew Humphrey and Joe Capstick play the groom (Robert) and best man (George), respectively, who let fly with song-and-tapdance mustard in "Cold Feets."

That piece early on kick-starts the show's rhythm and zip. Bonus points for Humphrey: Singing on roller skates.

Jason Richards and Karl Hamilton play the Gangsters, who are multiple jokes on the hoof. The two supply mirror-image moves as they spell danger before getting caught up in being a showbiz duo. The show creators must have had a lot of laffs making them up.



Erica Stephan and James Harms



Karl Hamilton, Jason Richards, Tim Monsion and Erin Parker

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Sean Fortunato is another laugh-maker as Aldolpho, a stereotypical Latin lover who sings and moves with all the nuances that hormones inspire.

Director and choreographer Matt Crowle has a high-quality creative/skill palette available, and he applies keen brush strokes both detailed and broadly comic and action-packed.

And there is a live orchestra, which in 1928 might have been called swell.

Opening night Wednesday had a fullness to it, helped along by a fullness in the house that included the audience reaching into the balcony.

At the start of the show, Man in Chair speaks of the time of his beloved musical theater show harkening to "a world of color and humor and romance." All that does happen when this show-within-a-show is played out. Man in Chair reaches a note of melancholy, followed by this suggestion of a theme: Enjoy.



Sean Fortunato and Meghan Murphy tango in THE DROWSY CHAPERONE.



Drew Humphrey and Joe Capstick .