

Hijinks Ensure and True Love Carries the Day in the Asolo Rep's New Play "The Matchmaker"

Bonnie Greenball Silvestri,, January 13, 2015

"The Matchmaker" currently playing at Asolo Repertory Theatre is a lovely production that celebrates life and love and most of all fosters a belief in having a healthy relationship with money.

The show introduces us to a merry band of turn-of-the-century upwardly mobile Yonkersites. Horace Vandergelder, played by [Steve Hendrickson](#), is a wealthy merchant widow, who has just banked a half a million dollars and is ready to take a new wife. He believes that the only way to ensure a well-run house is to marry and give his wife a vested interest in home improvements. Hendrickson fills every line with delight and manages to make you fall in love with this sexist curmudgeon.

Vandergelder employs two clerks, Cornelius Hacki (Buddy Hardt) and Barnaby Tucker (Owen Teague, who was a stand-out in this show as well as in his role as the



nephew in last year's "Hero"). When Vandergelder tells the two that they will never have even one night off a week, it was the most gut-wrenching part of an otherwise light-hearted play. All the two wanted was to experience adventure, so they took matters into their own hands, made their own destiny, and took off for New York City.

In between managing his own social life, Vandergelder found the time to destroy the romantic aspirations of his niece, Ermengarde (Andrea Adnoff) and her artist paramour, Ambrose Kemper (Paul Herbig).

Meanwhile, although Vandergelder has set his sights on Irene Molloy, a delightful milliner played by Olivia Williamson, his matchmaker, Mrs. Dolly Levi, has other plans for her ultimate "get." Once again, the stalwart

Peggy Roeder invests every character she plays on the Asolo stage with humanity and grace, and like Ma Joad, whom she brilliantly played in last year's stunning "Grapes of Wrath," keeps everyone together and the action afloat in "The Matchmaker."

Hijinks ensue, and love and romance carry the day.

Carolyn Michel as Miss Flora Van Husen steals the show in her scenes late in the second act. This matron is ruled by a steadfast belief in true love, and she has a youthful exuberance that sweeps all the young lovebirds up in her zest for life.

What "The Matchmaker" lacks in depth it makes up for in astute observations about life. Dolly rightly believes that money stored away is meaningless and only gains its value in circulation. As she said, money is not "worth a thing unless it's spread around encouraging young things to grow." If this clever woman were alive today, surely she would favor a stimulus package and tax cuts for the middle class over trickle down economics.

Asolo Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards selected "The Matchmaker," for the Asolo's ongoing examination of the American character. He sums up the significance of "The Matchmaker," the forerunner of the more prominently known "Hello Dolly," brilliantly: "It captures the heart of the human dilemma we understand so well in America: how to achieve financial security while at the same time experiencing the unbridled joy of living in the moment."

