

Stage review: The Curious Savage

‘Curious Savage’ a gentle, sweet comedy at Valley Repertory Company

**By Kory Loucks
Journal Inquirer**

Published: Thursday, November 12, 2009 10:06 PM EST



The Curious Savage

Theater: Valley Repertory Company

Location: 100 High St., Enfield

Production: Written by John Patrick. Directed by Patty Coope Piellucci. Produced by Jan Albetski. Stage managed by Jason Fregeau. Set and lighting design and technical direction by Eric Albetski.

Running time: Two hours, 30 minutes, with one intermission.

Show times: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. through Nov. 21.

Tickets: \$12, \$10 for seniors over 60 and youth under 12. Call 860-749-4665 or visit www.valleyrep.com

ENFIELD — The lovely thing about community theater is you get a chance to see shows that rarely see the light of day.

Take “The Curious Savage,” which was written by John Patrick and produced on Broadway in 1950, and running at the Valley Repertory Company in the Thompsonville section of Enfield.

The play is set in the ’40s, presumably after World War II.

A wealthy widow, Mrs. Savage, played with magnanimity by Jane Maulucci, has been committed to a private asylum by her greedy step-children — the U.S. Senator, Titus; Lily Belle; and Samuel; played by Mark Vogel, Lisa Coleman Hasty, and Eddie Burke respectively.

Savage says of Titus that the only reason the voters elect him to the U.S. Senate is to keep him out of the state.

The three want the \$10 million in bonds that Mrs. Savage has squirreled away somewhere, and they won’t take no for an answer, while she does her best to use their greed to her advantage.

Why have they committed such a heinous act of placing her in a mental institution? Because she wants all the money to go to her memorial fund which she calls her “happiness fund,” where she gives away grants for acts of random kindness, like giving an Italian man \$200 to buy a gravestone for his beloved dead horse.

The characters in the asylum are revealed one by one, and each has a charm and sweetness to them, which, compared to the greedy threesome, brings up the obvious question, who are the crazy ones?

There’s the war survivor Jeffrey, sensitively played by Logan Lopez; the high-strung violinist, Hannibal (Charles Schoenfeld); the forlorn mother, Florence (Lisa Eaton); the angry and silent Mrs. Paddy (Jan Albetski); the assistant with a secret Miss Willie (Lorrie Bacon); and the delightful Fairy May played with fragile delicacy and superb comic timing by Janine Flood.

When plain, sweet Fairy May learns a new resident is on the way she says with a sigh, “I hope she isn’t beautiful. Competition exhausts me.” She later says to Savage, “You’re very generous for your size and weight.” It’s really funny and all character driven.

Vogel and Burke are great as the nasty selfish sons, but Hasty as Lily Belle has spoiled rotten down to a science. And can that woman scream and swoon and be mean as only the ultra-rich can afford to be. She borders on the edge of camp, but keeps it believable.

At one point Lily Belle cries out in abject dejection and defeat, wailing, “I don’t know how to be poor,” when she learns that all the money is gone. Or is it? That’s part of the fun in this terrific play that should not be missed.

The set, by Eric Albetski, is a solid and well-appointed living room in the asylum, and the actors all move about naturally and comfortably in the space, with confident direction by Patty Coope Piellucci.

Just when you start thinking that an asylum might be a nice world to retreat to, the resident physician, Dr. Emmett, played with authority by Sue Reese, says, “They have found refuge in an eggshell world.” Then you know that hiding from the world is not the answer, as tempting as it might appear.

The play is a clever and interesting who-dun-it that keeps you guessing throughout. But the real delight of this precious play is in the language and the gentle, subtle, and sweet acting, with loving direction by Piellucci.

Time and again the Valley Repertory Company comes up with unusual and touching shows, as it has once again with “The Curious Savage.”