

Lead makes 'Dinner' palatable

WILLIAMSBURG Ovation: Ann Efimetz

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There are certain plays that make you realize the impact one performer can have on an audience. That was the case with the Williamsburg Players' current offering, "The Man Who Came to Dinner."

If the play was without the expertise of lead performer Chris Hull anchoring this production, this would have been a very different review.

In a play that is dated, long, and had an ending that came out of nowhere, it is Hull's work that made this one fun. There are other very good performances and some nice direction to boot, but for me, Hull was the focus.

Hull made his Players' debut as Sheridan Whiteside, but he is not new to the stage. According to his biography in the program, he has a long list of professional acting and directing credits. That experience transferred effortlessly to this production.

The play centers on Whiteside, who is a famous (and contemptuous) writer and radio personality. He hurts his hip after falling on the front steps of the Stanley home. As a result, he becomes wheelchair-bound, holding the entire family hostage to his whims and unreasonable demands.

Hull's Whiteside was smarmy, conniving...and surprisingly

endearing. You liked him despite his cantankerousness. Hull

ON STAGE

The Williamsburg Players present "The Man Who Came to Dinner" by Moss Hart and George Kaufmann. Directed by Peter Natale. Performances at the James-York Playhouse Wednesday-Saturday.

maneuvered the scrip as well as his wheelchair. Impressive.

Add a doddering nurse, an absent-minded doctor, a devoted secretary, a strange woman, a bourgeois actress, harried homeowners and two headstrong youth, and you get the basis for the action.

The play has a lot of humor in it. The situations are genuinely funny and in several parts, extremely so. But also be ready for a lot of references of people who lived in the 1940s. In fact, there is a six-page glossary of names to help you maneuver the names mentioned in the production.

It was directed by Peter Natale, who usually takes the helm for musicals, most recently "George M!" Natale did an admirable job with this often verbose play and a cast of more than 15.

Like a musical production,

comedy has to be well-orchestrated. There are some wonderful comedic crescendos, most notable at the end of the Second Act, when the nuttiness swelled.

Alexandra Tennyson, who performed last year in "Communicating Doors" returned to the James-York Playhouse as Lorraine Sheldon. Tennyson sparkled in the role, bringing an elegance that was indeed reminiscent of the starlets of 1940s Hollywood. This would be a good idea to praise Sasha Dofflemeyer's costuming. Great work, especially in outfitting Tennyson.

There's some other good work, too, including Betsy Jo Spence who debuted as Miss Preen, Jessica Krop as Maggie, Jim Lyreman as Bert Jefferson, Debbie Noonan as the off-the-wall Harriet Stanley, Dale Payne as Beverly Carlton and Bob Shea as Dr. Bradley.

Several actors double, and even tripled duties, playing a variety of smaller roles, including Al Schumann and Kevin Magill. Miguel Girona played a few roles as well, his best as the weirdly funny Banjo.

If you have a few hours to spare, I think you will enjoy yourself if you decide to be a guest at the Stanley house.