

'Drowsy Chaperone' flawless spoof of Broadway musicals

By Paul Babin
Contributing
Writer

Posted June 22,
2016



Karis Gallant plays Janet and Colleen Welsh is the Chaperone in "The Drowsy Chaperone,"

CHATHAM – How did they do it? How did they manage to lampoon the Broadway musical without compromising its inimitable exuberance?

Maybe the answer is that "The Drowsy Chaperone," which debuted Tuesday at Monomoy Theatre, is as much a celebration of the musical as it is a parody. You get the feeling that the writers Bob Martin and Don McKellar are mocking a genre they love.

The key character is "Man in Chair," the anonymous narrator who guides the audience through his love/hate relationship with "The Drowsy Chaperone," a hopelessly melodramatic 1928 musical he has never seen but constantly listens to on his record player. After a lengthy introduction in which he explains that he hates theater but is desperate for entertainment, he puts on the record and the show comes to life onstage behind him.

If "The Drowsy Chaperone" has a moral center, it's "Man in Chair," who looks to the Broadway musical as a way to escape his humdrum existence. As he laments to the audience, "Everything always works out in a musical. In real life, nothing ever works out."

The show within the show is about an acclaimed actress, Janet van de Graaff, who marries an oil tycoon, Robert Martin, which sets off her producer, Mr. Feldzieg, who is being hassled by mobsters, who are. ... But why bother with the plot? As "Man in Chair" explains, the plot's only there to get us to the next musical number.

My favorite number is probably "Cold Feets," featuring Kyle Rudolph as Robert Martin and Kyle Brand as his best friend, George. Rudolph commands the stage partly because of his superior tap-dancing skills and partly because he looks so much like an actor from the 1920s. I don't know if it's his John Gilbert mustache or the slicked-back hair, but I thought he looked straight out of a silent movie.

Colleen Welsh is just about perfect as the drowsy chaperone, who's funniest when she's guzzling vodka. To steal a phrase from "Man in Chair," her solo number "As We Stumble Along" is nothing less than a "rousing anthem to alcoholism."

I could go on about the rest of the cast or laud Mary O'Brady's expert direction, but I'd rather sum up the whole show by saying that there's absolutely nothing wrong with it.

In five years of reviewing theater for this newspaper, I have never written those words, but I must be honest when a show is this inspired. I know the summer theater season is just under way, but allow me to make a prediction: There won't be a better play on Cape Cod this year than "The Drowsy Chaperone."