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Monomoy Season Off To Rousing Start With 'Drowsy Chaperone'

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Colleen Welsh as the Chaperone and Bill Kux as Man in the Chair in Monomoy Theatre's production of "The Drowsy Chaperone." DAWNIELLA SINDER PHOTO

The man sits alone in his small, dreary apartment, lonely and socially isolated in a time way before cell phones. Sitting in an easy chair in arm's reach of his beloved record player that even his cleaning lady is forbidden to touch, he invites the audience to listen along to the tunes that carry him away when he's feeling blue and anxious. "A story and a few good songs are just a little something you have to escape from the horrors of real life." Good advice, especially in today's times.

For its season opener, guest Equity actor Bill Kux leads the Monomoy Theater Company in raising its magical blue sateen curtain on a fictional 1928 musical comedy, "The Drowsy Chaperone." Visions of statuesque showgirls and handsome leading men are spotlighted to glitzy, stardust proportions when the show comes to life in his dull sanctuary. Kux, a Monomoy favorite, is totally charming and at ease in his starring tour guide role. Kux speaks directly to the audience, asking permission to play his special recording starting with a welcoming overture. The caviar is chilled, champagne is flowing, and all the world is a party for the well-to-do of the Roaring Twenties.

Director Mary O'Brady pulls out all the stops on this five-time 2006 Tony Award winner, including Best Score. The cast of student actors and familiar veterans bring to life a flamboyant gathering of characters who are lively, flashy, brilliant, gaudy, and even sometimes tasteless. Kyle Brand's snappy choreography, Phil Rittner's orchestra in the rafters, Nicole Bianco's fluid and pleasant set designs, plus Alexander Allison's elegant and original costuming complete a perfectly sublime portrait which the talented cast ignite to glowing proportions.

"Fancy Dress" welcomes the glamorous showgirl Janet Van de Graaff (Karis Gallant), who chooses to give up her career for marriage to the wealthy Robert Martin (Kyle Rudolph) even though she has "millions" of fans. Follies producer Mr. Feldzieg (Alan Rust) is physically threatened by two gangsters impersonating pastry chefs (funnymen Daniel Shea and Nate Healey). Janet must return to the show or else Feldzieg's Follies will fold, and so will he. This wedding must be stopped.

The bridegroom Robert and best man George (Kyle Brand) do their best to make "Cold Feet" feel hot in an exhilarating wedding day jitters tap dance to audience cheers. Bride Janet is a "Show Off" with the company until her swaggering chaperone (Colleen Welsh) "Stumbles Along" while a bumbling Latin Lothario (Jack Plozay) is enticed to seduce Janet to make Robert jealous and spoil the wedding, except for Janet pretending to be Mimi while enticing Robert for a kiss and he does and she calls off the wedding as the "Accident Waiting to Happen" is followed by a "Toledo Surprise" with full company. See what I mean? Act 1 ends. Subplots include the plan for sumptuous wedding festivities by Underling the noble butler (Billy Saunders Jr.) and the beautiful Mrs. Tottendale (Madeleine Stevens), while Trix the Aviatrix (J.S. Workman) and apartment Superintendent (Arlene Bozich) make unanticipated appearances. Who made up this nonsensical plot line? There's even an Imperial China number, skipping LP, time to pee, and a power outage.

Robert Martin and Janet Van de Graaff, two members of Toronto's Second City comedy troupe, actually created the whole "schtick" along with their talented friends as an engagement gift to one another, rather than the traditional array of pots and pans, etc. Martin in real life was "the man in the chair," falling in love at the least expected moment, who went on to co-write the book with Don McKellar for the full-length musical. Music and lyrics are by Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison.

With a smattering of television Comedy Central, modern day obsession with self-absorption, and a salute to the heyday of grand Broadway musicals, "The Drowsy Chaperone" is anything but drowsy; it's absurd and silly with several up-to-date Chatham one-liners. Monomoy Theater is off to a rousing start of pure summertime entertainment. Leave your cell phones at home and remember the days when it was OK to laugh and not take life so seriously.