

'Our Town' weaves its magic at PS/21

By Bruce G. Hallenbeck

"Look at that moon. Potato weather for sure," says one of the characters in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," and the magical thing about seeing it under the Tent at PS/21 in

THEATER REVIEW

Chatham is that, if you look up and to your right, there's the moon in the sky. I don't know what a potato moon looks like, but it should look like what the audience saw the other night during Walking the Dog Theater's exquisite production of the venerable play.

As the Stage Manager, David Anderson is our amiable guide through the lives, loves and deaths of the people of Grover's Corners; part Greek chorus, part Godlike figure, he

wanders about the stage commenting on the action, interviewing the characters, imparting words of wisdom. With minimal sets and virtually no props, the characters go about their daily lives in what may seem to us now to be an idealized version of a small American town at the turn of the 20th century. But there is a reason this play has endured through the generations; it speaks to universal truths in a folksy, accessible way while maintaining the pure poetry of its language.

"Our Town" is the very definition of ensemble acting, although there are standouts in this excellent cast. The young lovers George (Andrew Rosenberg) and Emily (Bethany Caputo) are beautifully played, with Caputo given the most

challenging work (especially in Act Three) and delivering on all counts. Only Wilder could get away with setting his final act in a graveyard, with its residents in deep conversation with each other about the meaning of existence. At one point Emily asks the Stage Manager, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? Every, every minute?" The Stage Manager's reply is uncharacteristically terse: "No. The saints and poets, maybe; they do some."

Robert Ian MacKenie as Dr. Gibbs and Benedicta Bertau as Julia Gibbs are also excellent, and there's a strong performance by Nancy Rothman as Myrtle Webb, Emily's kind but sometimes too honest mother. And of course, Anderson is the glue that holds the play togeth-

er, wrapping his voice around such lines as, "We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars... everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings."

He also delivers my favorite line in the play when he notes that after death, "we're all weaned away from Earth; that's how I put it. Weaned away."

PS/21's/Walking the Dog Theater's production of "Our Town" is first class in every sense of the term, a midsummer night's dream not to be missed. It's playing through August 1 at PS/21 in Chatham. Call (518) 392-6121 for ticket information.