

WTD's 'Our Town' is sheer theatrical magic

By John Paul Keeler
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The summer season of theatre and music is in full swing.

Walking The Dog Theatre in collaboration with PS/21 in Chatham has produced a fabulous production of Thornton Wilders's 1938 Pulitzer Prize winning play.

REVIEW

This writer wondered if after a half century interval in seeing the play, would it be dated? Not at all, it is as riveting a depiction of home town life in the 21st century as it was in the 20th. Wilders genius of characterization mirrors human life from cradle to grave in touching, humorous humanity. Every audience member is drawn in to "Our Town" for an evening of sheer theatrical magic. That drawing in is in part the result of Walking the Dog's character as a company in grasping the playwright's intention and avoiding the trap of show biz glitz so often prevalent in regional theatre, especially in the summer season.

David Anderson's direction was so fluid and the pantomime of the characters from the milk delivered with the imaginary horse, the paper boy, the cooking, all bringing high imagination in an almost Balletic expressivity.

Set and costume design by



Peter Blandori for PS/21

George and Emily realize that they are meant for each other. Andrew Rosenberg as George Gibbs, Bethany Caputo as Emily Webb.

Kate Jean Wall was just right and as usual Jonathan Talbotts music added both mood and musical color to the production.

The entire cast performed their parts so marvelously that it seemed that each one was the star of the performance.

David Anderson was superb as the Stage Manager. Robert Mackenzie was an outstanding Dr. Gibbs. Benedicta Bertau was perfect as Mrs. Gibbs and brought high art to the cemetery scene. Nancy Rothman and Eddie Allen as Mr. and Mrs. Webb were ideal home town parents. Father Gary

Gelfenbien seemed to relish his cameo role as Professor Willards. Andrew Rosenberg played George Gibbs with such sensitivity, and fullness of expression that he created the role in a way that would have delighted Thornton Wilder. Bethany Caputo was both delightful and touching as Emily Webb. One cannot forget the development of the young couple from friendship to discovered love in a soda store. And the fluster of the wedding morning, the last minute conversations with the parents and the wedding itself, with the choir led by the alcoholic choir master.

Finally life coming full cycle in the cemetery with the challenge of eternal life. There are ten performances left through August 1 and this "Our Town" is so special that it should have full houses for the rest of the run. For times and tickets call 518.392.6121.

Pergolesi at Bard

Aston Magna celebrated the 300th Anniversary of the birth of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi with a concert devoted entirely to the music of the composer. It was one of the most beautiful programs in the long history of Aston Magna at Olin Hall at Bard

The program began with the ravishing Concerto for Violin and Strings played with wonderful sound by Daniel Stepner. The poignancy of the piece and holding its own with the concerti of Bach and Vivaldi made the composers death at age 21 seem all that more tragic for the music world. The musical silences followed by upward sweeps from the strings produced a delicious humor

The first half of the program ended with the Cantata "Orfeo" for tenor, strings and continuo. The Baroque period was obsessed with the story of Orfeo and Euridice, all the way from Monteverdi to Gluck and Haydn. Tenor Frank Kelley a master of

vocal declamation brought the longing and frustration of Orfeo for Euridice across to his appreciative audience.

After intermission "La Serva Padrona" (The Maid Made Mistress) although an intermezzo meant to be performed between the acts of an Opera Seria it was in fact the first comedy or Opera Buffa in the Opera World and a point of departure for those great works of Paisiello, Mozart, Cimarosa, Rossini and Donizetti. The work is rather slight but awfully funny.

David Ripley plays Uberto the aging bachelor and Kristen Watson plays Serpina his maid. Frank Kelley plays the only other character, Vespone the mute valet. Kelley nearly steals the show in his shaving scene with Uberto and his side splitting appearance disguised as a pirate having a terrible time drawing his sword from its scabbard. Ripley an acclaimed veteran singing actor was wonderful as Uberto. Young soprano Kristen Watson was somewhat stiff as Serpina and vocally at times rather squeaky. But in the arias her top voice finally shined. She needs to concentrate on vocal quality, relax and play the role she is singing.

La Serva Padrona was really a romp and the audience loved it. The final Aston Magna performance is tonight at Olin Hall at 8 p.m.