

WEST SIDESTORY "IT WILL BLOW YOU AWAY." -WOR Radio May 30 THRU Jun 1 StateTheatreNJ.org 732-246-SHOW (7469) NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

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'Moon Over Buffalo' Laugh it up with Ken Ludwig and Actors' NET of Bucks County DATE POSTED: Wednesday, June 4, 2014 4:40 PM EDT By Anthony Stoekert

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George Hartpence and Andrew James Gordon in Moon Over Buffalo.

ACTORS' NET of Bucks County has been very serious lately with productions of Tennessee Williams Night of the Iguana, Tracy Letts' August: Osage County and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

They were ambitious production, and August was stellar, but the tone has changed at the Heritage Center in Morristown with the current run of Moon Over Buffalo, and this comic relief is most welcome.

There's nothing deep going on here, just outrageous fun. This staging of Ken Ludwig's farce — on stage through June 15 — is a reminder that the folks at Actors' NET are just as adept with funny business as they are with serious stuff.

The crazy story is about married couple George and Charlotte Hay (played by real-life married couple George Hartpence and Carol Thompson). They had some measure of stardom a while ago, and now spend their lives on the road performing Noel Coward's Private Lives and Edmond Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac.

But this is 1953, and eyes are glued to screens — big ones in movie theaters and smaller ones in living rooms. As Ethel (played by Cheryl Doyle) puts it "Theater is dying but it's still breathing and it's all we've got."

The other members of this troubled company are Paul (played by John Bergeron), the ex-fiance of George and Charlotte's daughter, and Eileen (Elizabeth Rzasa), an actress who has been fooling around with George, and has the positive pregnancy test to prove it.

Into the mix comes the daughter, Rosalind (played by Tess Ammerman), and her fiance Howard (Andrew James Gordon). Howard is a weatherman, good-hearted but goofy and excited to be meeting this legendary theater family — little does he know.

George and Charlotte hear news that Frank Capra is directing a new movie, Twilight of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and they're livid over the casting of Ronald Colman — George should be wearing those tights — and Greer Garson, who Charlotte calls a "stupid little bitch." They also mock Capra: What's next Mr. Pimpernel Goes to Washington?

But Capra quickly becomes a genius after Colman breaks his legs and Garson quits. "The most wonderful thing has happened, Ronald Colman is crippled!" George shouts with glee. Capra is interested in casting George and Charlotte, and is on his way to Buffalo to see that night's performance of Private Lives, or is it Cyrano?

Quite a few members of this cast are returning from Actors' NET's last play — Julius Caesar. Mr. Hartpence is a regular at Actors' NET, often in classical roles, and here he gets to play on his talents for the classics. He hams it up in the opening scene as George (the character) and Charlotte rehearse for Cyrano. He also gets lots of laughs hurling insults at Ms. Doyle's Ethel, acting drunk, kidnapping someone (long story) and hiding various secrets from different people.

Ms. Thompson is just as funny as Charlotte. She's carrying on an affair of her own, with the wealthy show biz attorney Richard — he taught Esther Williams how to swim (and he's played by James Cordingley). Her funniest moments come when she mistakes Howard for Capra.

Ms. Ammerman is another standout — in the classic role of the woman trying to leave behind passion (in the form of Paul and the theater) for the nice, safe choice (personified by Howard). She's also a voice of sanity, but that doesn't stop her from getting involved in some silliness.

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Mr. Bergeron also returns to Actors' NET from *Julius Caesar*, in which he gave a powerful performance as Mark Antony. His comic timing is terrific, and he does a great job with some physical bits. Ms. Rzasa is very funny as Eileen — she a terrific crier; Mr. Cordingley is charming as Richard, Mr. Gordon is pure funny innocence as Howard.

Joe Doyle directs and gets everything he needs to out of his cast — from snappy one-liners to physical bits — all while keeping the confusing plot clear, and the pace quick. The scene where George goes on stage for *Private Lives* dressed up as Cyrano is one of the funniest I've seen in a long time. In addition to starring, Mr. Hartpence designed the set — backstage at a theater, with plenty of doors that are primed for slamming.

The experience of this crew was on full display during a scene where the leg of couch broke after Mr. Hartpence sat on it—the actor didn't miss a beat, and went with the moment.

This show is so good, it literally broke a leg.

Actors' NET of Bucks County is presenting *Moon Over Buffalo* at the Heritage Center, 635 N. Delmor Ave., Morrisville, Pa., through June 15. Performances: Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$20, \$17 seniors, \$10 children 12 and younger; www.actorsnetbucks.org; 215-295-3694.

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