

If you feel nobody cares if you're alive, try
missing a couple of rehearsals.

—Anonymous

Newsletter of the Heritage Hunt Little Theater



Play Time

November 2005



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Board of Directors

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Vice President
Sandy Mills
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The Final Word about *Afraid of the Dark*

by Alan Mager, Director

After months of preparation, the HHLT fall production, *Afraid of the Dark*, opened to an enthusiastic crowd on November 1. The show was very well received by our audiences, and our cast and crew produced four nearly flawless performances. For the four nights, we sold 786 out of a possible 832 seats which well exceeded our goal, and I predict a complete sellout for our shows in the not-too-distant future.

This show raised the bar for HHLT productions with significant improvements in scenery, lighting, sound and makeup. In past newsletter articles, I have talked about our technical improvements and the hard work of our many volunteers who implemented these improvements and in so many other ways brought our show to life. All these people have my undying gratitude for a job very well done.

In my final words about *Afraid of the Dark*, however, I want to direct my praise to the 13 actors who were the heart and soul of our play. Whether their parts were large or small, all the actors in this cast were dedicated to learning their lines, defining their characters and constantly improving their performances throughout the rehearsal process. My difficulties in working with this cast were virtually non-existent, and I often wondered why a director was even needed. Six of our actors were new to the Heritage Hunt stage, and some had never performed in any play before. But all of them conducted themselves in a very professional manner, and the camaraderie within the cast was infectious – every rehearsal was a joy.

Newcomer Jim Burwell was always patient in waiting for his chance to shine in the play's final scene. His performance as the criminal mastermind, Robinson, was rock-solid, reliable and effective.

HHLT veteran Arlene Maroney broke new ground in developing her character – the feisty housekeeper Mrs. Bundy – by abandoning her New Jersey speech patterns and adopting the

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Afraid of the Dark: A Review

by Mary Winsky

What was a mystery-farce doing in a nice place like Heritage hunt? The HH Little Theater was the culprit. But instead of victims, audiences became the lucky recipients of a dinner-theater event of intrigue and fun.

Alan Mager was the talented director this time of James Reach's compelling play *Afraid of the Dark*. He certainly wasn't afraid of the dark as evidenced by this dynamic choice. But alas, the stuttering Chauncey Stone, played quakingly by Rick Sullivan, was. Good thing he had just married beautiful and strong Lillums, gracefully performed by Lana Krogman.

Bride and bridegroom live out a non-traditional (to say the least!) honeymoon at Stone Mansion. Stage Manager Sandy Mills did an impressive job, as well as Costume Consultant Pat Dews and Makeup Consultant Sandy Iasiello. The wonderful scenery was created by Lloyd King and Dave Milbradt, who also did sound. Obie Dugan lit and darkened the stage as the plot thickened.

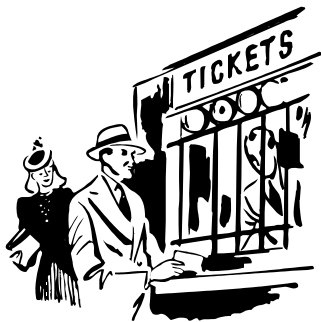
In this setting, the weird array of characters that were to make the evening so memorable could develop to the extreme. General Lee, the most extreme military "genius" the DC area has ever known, leads the charge--on his broomstick horse--throughout. Right behind him, rides Gridley, his hairy chested, boom booming aide-de-lunatic, whom no one would guess was the seemingly sane ticket organizer, Denny Cumber. As if these boisterous bullies aren't enough, Mata Hari, seductively played by Tina Mullins, slinks on and off stage, raising the price on her "secrets." Lest these loonies get too out-of-control, wild-haired Queen Elizabeth is there to keep imperious order. "Off with their heads" Beth Harrington commands in her purple velvet robe and Alice in Wonderland irrationality.

In stark contrast, the rigidity of Mrs. Mayhew, in no-nonsense power suit, chills

the stage with her sinister darkness. Carol Katchmark, this controlling and formidable commander, keeps her unusual butler, Thomas, in check. Wrapped in mummy strips, gray-faced, black-eyed Bill Harrison carries out her every ominous order. Poor Karen is their immediate victim. Held captive, Joyce Mancini wins our sympathy for this imprisoned young heroine. But it is the phone repairman Joe who is her real ally. An undercover FBI agent we later learn, Art Moscatello gives us hope for Karen, his partner's rescue. But without the endless chatter of the amazingly devoted but permanently confused Aunt Alberta Stone, Karen's plea for help wouldn't have had a voice. The audience LOVED Aileen Drennan in this hilarious role, perhaps because her dotty memory and mouth seemed so true! So Karen truly needed the pocketbook-toting, slip-showing, rolled stocking housekeeper, Mrs. Bundy, hysterically portrayed by Arlene Maroney. With her no-nonsense help, they snare not only the evil Mrs. Mayhew and her cadaverous butler, but also the ringleader Robinson. Handsomely uniformed as a state trooper, Jim Burwell is nonetheless really the head of the ring the FBI has been hoping to break.

It all ends comically well. Bad guys led away, honeymooners blissful, and best of all, Chauncey cured not only of his phobia about the dark, but also of his domination by his controlling Aunt Alberta. How sweet and satisfying an ending could an audience wish for?

But not only the actors satisfies our wishes. Treva Whyte and Dot Schueteze made sure our dinner menu was delicious. Elena Portoles helped Denny with ticket sales, Bets Knepley did program and publicity and her husband Ed, still photographs. What a team. And of course behind this team were all those other helpers who make this senior adult theater so successful. With all this hard work and talent it's really no mystery that this farce was such a success. They had fun. We had fun.



Tickets – Tickets – Tickets

by Denny Cumber aka The Admiral

Now that *Afraid of the Dark* has been put to sleep, it's time to look at how we did

with the ticket sales. As with the two previous plays, we sold the vast majority of our tickets one month before and our final ticket sales totaled 784 (out of 832 possible).

Hurray! As with the other productions, we were essentially sold out for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday with Tuesday, opening night, coming in at 80%. Right up to the last afternoon, I was selling tickets as residents who had procrastinated about buying heard from their neighbors what great fun the play was.

Thanks to all the ticket sellers and hostesses that helped to make the process run more smoothly. Although many hours are spent at the Club selling tickets, I must tell you how much fun it is to meet and greet so many of our friends and neighbors as we while away the hours together, waiting for it to be time to start selling. Sometimes it gets a bit raucous but discretion precludes me from sharing *those* stories. As you know, some come as early as 1:30 so that they can be sure to get the seats/tables they want. Isn't it nice to be wanted?

This Fall I had the welcome assistance of Elena Portoles who has agreed to take over the ticket sales. As many of you know, Elena is a really fun and nice person, and she's smart, organized and good with details to boot. We're fortunate that she has offered her services. She was doing such a great job of keeping things straight on play nights (what do you mean my tickets aren't good for tonight just because they have yesterday's date?) that she asked for double wages. OK with me!

So, I leave this committee in good hands and thank so many of you for the help and fun. Onward to the Spring production.

Nominees for Board of Directors

The following members have agreed to run for the three seats on the Board: Jim Campbell, Joan DeBell, Joyce Mancini, Nanette Ross and Rick Sullivan. The term of office is for two years--2006-2008. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the November 17th meeting at 7 PM in the Craft Room.

A big thank you to these Little Theater members for volunteering to run.

Dates to Remember

General Meetings

Fourth Thursday at 7 PM in the Craft Room
No meeting in December

ELECTION of OFFICERS: Nov 17th

Readers Theater Workshop

1st & 3rd Sat at 10 AM in the Craft Room
Nov 19: Readthru of *When in Rome*
Dec 3: Readthru of *When in Rome*

No Meeting Dec 17th



Readers Theater Workshop Update

by Bets Knepley

At the last meeting, we discussed the use of "pitch" when trying to express different emotions.

Next, we'll be talking about how to use pace and pause in dialogue.

A mini-introduction to the May 2006 production, *When in Rome*, was presented. During the next two meetings, there will be a readthru of the play, which is a musical comedy.

Audition packets will be available at the RTW December 3rd meeting. Auditions are tentatively scheduled for mid January 2006.

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difficult Down East accent. She even had this old New Englander convinced, oh, a-yuh!

Joyce Mancini and Art Moscatello played the two FBI agents who eventually solve the underlying case in *Afraid of the Dark*. Joyce overcame obstacles as the captive Karen, and also triumphed over a real-life back ailment that threatened to knock her from the cast. What a trooper! Art added a welcome comedic flair to his characterization of the dashing Joe who rescues Karen and takes charge of the criminals in the end.

In their collective lunacy, Beth Harrington as Queen Elizabeth and Tina Mullins as Mata Hari developed an on-stage connection that was not obvious in the script but was a delight to the audience. These experienced character actors gave us memorable performances as two of Mrs. Mayhew's institutionalized "loonies." Just to test the limits of their talent, I'd like to see either or both of them in more serious roles one day.

And speaking of loonies, I was delighted to discover that my instincts in casting Sil Zinicola and Denny Cumber as General Lee and his aide-de-lunatic Gridley were right on the mark. Sil and Denny gave their characters a high-energy zaniness that made them audience favorites. In his first-ever stage appearance, Sil worked like a pro, taking direction very well and constantly seeking to improve. Denny was diligent in mastering the slapstick routines, but her greatest joy may have come from having a new beard and chest hair.

Our two primary villains were played by Carol Katchmark as the severe, domineering Mrs. Mayhew and Bill Harrison as mummified Thomas the butler(?). Carol managed to get through the rehearsal schedule without breaking any bones this time and gave a great performance as the very much in charge, yet strangely vulnerable mistress of the "rest home." Bill – another HHLT newcomer – showed depth in

portraying Thomas fresh from the tomb and struggling to regain his humanity. For every performance, Bill had to spend three hours having his makeup applied – the man is a model of patient tolerance.

In casting a play, the director tries to find the actors who meet his vision of the characters as closely as possible. My vision came closest to realization when I chose Aileen Drennan to play Alberta Stone, who to my mind is the signature character in this farce – a woman who fancies herself to be a cut above all those around her but who is, in fact, nuttier than any inmate in the asylum. Aileen did a super job of mastering her very difficult lines and bringing Aunt Alberta to life.

Afraid of the Dark revolves around the characters of the newly-weds, Chauncey and Lillums Stone, who were played by Rick Sullivan and Lana Krogman. Both had to learn a very large number of lines and spent countless hours working together to develop the interaction between their characters. Their extremely solid performances formed the glue that held the whole show together. Rick gets better with every role he's played for HHLT, and Lana will have to work very hard, indeed, to improve on her efforts in her first performance with us. Although Chauncey and Lillums had many funny lines of their own, they primarily served as the "straight men" around whom the abundant lunacy of the show was draped. Performing this function is not easy, but Lana and Rick pulled it off extremely well. These two fine actors both still work full time. Imagine the performances they could give us if they could devote more time to the theater!

Now the set has been struck, and *Afraid of the Dark* is only a memory – but what a great one! I will be forever grateful to my fine cast and to all the behind-the-scenes personnel who made this novice director's job easier and much more fun than I could ever have imagined. Who knows . . . I might even consider doing this again sometime.

Afraid of the Dark
Director Alan Mager

below



Right—Stage Manager Sandy Mills
Below—Sound Tech Dave Milbradt &
Light Tech Obie Dugan





The Family

Below
Alberta Stone
a devoted aunt
Aileen Drennan



Above
Chauncey Stone
a young bridegroom
Rick Sullivan



Above
Lillums Stone
a new bride
Lana Krogman



The Loonies

Left
Queen Elizabeth
Beth Harrington
Below
General Lee
Sil Zinicola



Above
Admiral Gridley
Denny Cumber

Right
Mata Hari
Tina Mullins



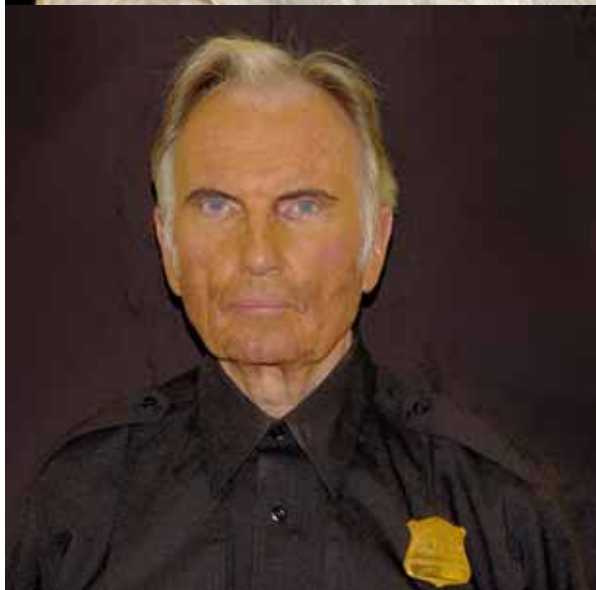
The Bad Guys



Left
Mrs. Mayhew
**Carol
Katchmark**



Left
Thomas
Bill Harrison



Left
Robinson
Jim Burwell

Right
Mrs. Bundy
**Arlene
Maroney**

The Good Guys



Right
Karen
**Joyce
Mancini**



Right
Joe
**Art
Moscatello**

