

REVIEW--Afraid of the Dark

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. That's entertainment!