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CRITICAL REVIEW

an audience-participation mystery

by

Eileen Moushey

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INTRODUCTION

CRITICAL REVIEW has a different format/structure from most of our other scripts. Almost all our other shows are written to be performed for real mystery buffs - folks who are really “into” playing detective, finding clues, and arriving at a logical solution. Audience members get totally involved, and the mystery is usually the focal point of the event. Almost all our shows feature what is basically a one-act play that is fully scripted.

What I have discovered, however, is that there is a big audience for simpler, less plot-driven shows. For fund-raisers, many of my non-profit clients do not want anything that is too engrossing. They want to raise money for their organization and direct their audience (and their checkbooks!) toward “profitable” activities. While there will (hopefully) be a built-in profit in the ticket price, most groups also have other things going on that evening - raffles or auctions. They want entertainment that amuses and involves the audience but does not distract from other, more profitable activities. They want eccentric characters who interact with the audience, confrontations, and a crime, but don’t want a lengthy presentational-type performance. They prefer a show that is NOT plot-heavy. They prefer an open-ended-anyone-could-have-done-it approach. Which is why CRITICAL REVIEW leaves that question up to the audience, who vote on “whodunit” and that’s the solution scene which is played. The solution scene is written as scripted dialogue. and this script includes a solution for all suspects.

While reading CRITICAL REVIEW, keep in mind that you will be relying heavily on the improvisational skills of your actors - cast accordingly. Comic timing, and the ability to think-on-your-feet is more important than being able to do Chekhov.

While CRITICAL REVIEW is written to be used as a fund raiser for a theatre, it can be “tweaked” and adapted to fit events for other types of organizations. The best way to do this is to give a premise sheet or put a sign on the door. “As you enter these doors you are visiting the XYZ Theatre Company.”

You may (if your audience is very conservative) have a problem with some aspects of the storyline. These may be changed. I find the storyline/plot to be quite tame and I’ve gone to some pains regarding ‘language.’ You will note that while there is innuendo, there is very little that is said explicitly. However, experience has taught us that there are some communities that are extremely sensitive to ANYTHING. I’ve given up trying to figure out just what will offend! For that reason, please contact me for permission if you wish to make changes. This is readily given, but I need to be asked.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SELMA WILLSBURY - mid-to-late 40's; attractive; has an air of confidence and superiority. SELMA has reviewed restaurants, music, opera, ballet, and now - theatre. She's never actually created anything herself, only criticized others.

GARTH J. WILLSBURY III - mid-to-late 20's; British accent, a playboy; suave and assured, the product of elite schools. The only people that get to him are SELMA (his mother) who is capable of reducing him to a little boy; and GISELLE who is the first person he's ever loved more than himself. His pet name for her is "Zellie."

OLGA KALINKOFF - older, Russian. Dressed all in black, with long skirt, hair worn tightly in bun. A classically trained actress in Russia, Olga developed the Kalinkoff Method of acting. For the past 10 years, Olga has devoted herself to her star pupil, GISELLE, who is on the brink of stardom.

GISELLE MARTIN - 20's. Beautiful. GISELLE is an actress and has lived her whole life with only the dream of being on the stage in musical theatre. Until she met GARTH, that is, who swept her off her tap shoes and promptly got her pregnant. She is determined to marry him, with or without his mother's approval and consent.

WILHELM BIERENSTEICHLER - 50's. WILHELM (vilhelm) is from Germany, a brewmeister from a long line of brewmeisters. Wealthy and military in bearing, he is a "man's man" and a stickler for rules. His biggest regret is that he never had a son to pass on Bierensteichler Beers to.

ROCKY MCDONOUGH - older. ROCKY is a security guard at the venue. He treasures this job as it requires little of him and he gets to wear a neat uniform and carry a gun.

BACK STORY

What follows is the "back story" of CRITICAL REVIEW. Please keep in mind that all the information contained in the back story does NOT have to be imparted to the audience. Certainly, bits and pieces can be used to answer questions, etc. and serve as a "springboard" for ideas you may develop during rehearsals. The back story also is very helpful to the actors in developing their characters. Finally, MOST IMPORTANT: what makes audience-participation mysteries especially fun is to insert local references. This is especially true of CRITICAL REVIEW. Look for ways and places to use audience members' names and locales near your event. Look for ways to adapt the back story to make it seem like it was written especially for your audience.

Selma Willsbury grew up on a farm in Delray, Ohio, a fact she tries to hide beneath layers and layers of sophistication. She always knew she was 'better' than her folks, who were poor but honest chicken farmers. She was determined to become 'somebody.' She cheated and backstabbed her way through high school. Her only real achievement there was as editor of the school paper, a position she acquired by blackmailing the teacher/advisor, Mr. Burke, who had a predilection for dressing up as Judy Garland. Selma graduated early, as a result of good grades (and more cheating and more blackmail) and the school's eagerness to be rid of her. Immediately after graduation, she stole her parent's egg money and traveled to Europe where she met a handsome young German officer, Wilhelm Bierensteichler.

Wilhelm was one of twin sons of a beer-making family. Because his twin, Franz, was two minutes older, it was he who was the heir apparent to the Beirensteichler Brewery. This was despite the fact that, as they grew, it was apparent that Wilhelm had a natural way with hops and barley. Wilhelm, denied the vocation that was closest to his heart, grew sad and despondent. He joined the German Army and found, in its discipline and regimentation, some small amount of comfort which compensated for the loss of his first love - beer.

It was this scenario that was in play when Selma and Wilhelm first met during a chance encounter at the Eva Braun Museum. Immediately smitten, Wilhelm sought to impress the beautiful young American girl, and introduced himself as "Franz." Selma, a dedicated beer-drinker, knew of Franz Beirensteichler, had seen his picture in the German papers, and set out to charm and seduce him. A small luncheon of knockwurst was followed by a visit to a small hotel on the Kребenstrausser and an afternoon that was forever etched in Wilhelm's memory. A torrid love affair ensued during which Wilhelm attempted to tell Selma the truth and even, with his sense of honor, to break it off. For he had finally found the woman who could make him forget beer and he was hopelessly in her thrall.

Selma, for her part, saw Franz/Wilhelm as the meal (beer?) ticket that would insure that she'd never, ever, ever have to return to Delray and the chickens again. She pressed Franz/Wilhelm about meeting his family but he always came up with excuses. She thought, wrongly, that he was ashamed of her humble beginnings and rotten taste in clothes. Determined to trap him, Selma purposely became pregnant. Wilhelm was overjoyed - he wanted to marry her and proposed. She accepted at once. It was only then that Wilhelm confessed his secret - that rather than being the Beirensteichler heir, he was but a poor German army officer. He was convinced that, by this time, it would not matter to Selma. He was wrong. She unleashed a string of invectives not heard in Germany since Himmler broke wind during one of Der Fuhrer's speeches. Although he begged her to stay, Selma immediately packed her bags and left.

Wilhem was at first heartbroken, then increasingly bitter - towards Selma in particular, then American women in general. He threw himself into a three year spree of seducing and deserting American women tourists. One of these was traveling with her young child and from him Wilhelm contracted the measles which left him weak and sterile. He spent over a year in a sanatorium. It was only the death of his twin brother Franz, in a freak accident involving an exploding beer bottle, that roused him from his illness to take over, finally, the family business.

But he never forgot Selma, and the sight of young children playing reduced him to tears for the child he never knew. He established the Beirensteichler Brewery Home for Abandoned Boys (BBHAB) and vowed someday, somehow to find the son (and he was sure it WAS a son) that had been stolen from him.

Selma, after leaving Wilhelm, traveled to England and spent her pregnancy there. She was able to conceal her condition and get a job for the London Tattler as a copy editor. It was there she met the man who would be her mentor and future husband, Garth J. Willsbury II. Willsbury was the theatre critic for the Tattler and, in Selma, he'd finally met the one person whose bitchiness outdid his own. Willsbury, who was at that time dating a London bobby named Ken, recognized that Selma and her soon-to-be-born child were a way to finally lay certain "rumors" to rest and get his own family off his back about getting married and giving them grandchildren. And so they married and shortly after Garth J. Willsbury III was born. Selma had planned to leave child-rearing to nannies but at the moment of Garth III's birth, she underwent a transformation. Garth was then, and continued to be, the center of Selma's universe. She took care of him completely by herself, never allowing anyone else near the boy except for Garth II who proved to be an excellent and doting father, albeit an occasionally absent one (as when the fleet was in). These were also the years where Selma learned from her husband the secret of being a critic - you don't have to be able to do anything, or even know about it, in order to rip it to shreds. It was a lesson that would serve Selma well for the rest of her life.

Life was idyllic for young Garth III those first few years. He had a mother who adored him and gave in to his slightest whim and took him to cricket matches, Wimbledon, and rugby tournaments. His father took him to dog shows and home and garden exhibitions. Together, they exposed him to the arts and fine restaurants and the very best that London society had to offer. And, oh, the parade of friends. Mostly male. Oddly, they didn't seem to be friends that his parents had in common. His mother had 'her' friends and his father had 'his.' Who always seemed to stay overnight or the entire weekend. It was quite curious from Garth III's point of view. And even he, as he grew older, could not help but notice that he bore exactly no resemblance to his father. But his curiosity about these things was nothing to the curiosity about girls that began when he was 6 and became

uncontrollable by the time he was 12. From about that point on, it was difficult for the Willsburys to hire any female domestic help. (Male domestic help had already been a big problem.) After an unfortunate incident involving a maid and the dumb waiter, Selma had reluctantly agreed to Garth II's repeated assertion that the boy needed to be sent away to school. So at 14, Garth III packed his bags and, with a tasty lunch basket prepared by his father, headed to the all-boy preparatory school of Millstone.

Millstone proved to do nothing to dampen Garth III's enthusiasm for the ladies and he was in repeated trouble for peeping on the headmaster's wife and sneaking out at night to visit pubs. When his world-class collection of girly magazines was discovered in the hymnal rack in the choir loft, he was almost sent down. It was only through the efforts of his father, who had some special 'friends' on the Board, that he was kept and allowed to graduate. But another blow faced the boy shortly after he returned home. Garth II, while doing research on a critique of the London Zoo, was attacked and trampled by a rogue giraffe. After his death, Selma made another horrendous discovery - Garth II had invested heavily in a chain of tanning salons and had lost the family money. All that was left was a 2 million pound insurance policy from Lloyd's of London on Selma, which she hesitated to cash in, as she was worried what would happen to Garth III in the event of her passing. There was nothing to be done for it but to return home to America. Selma realized that she would have to work, but she also impressed upon Garth III the absolute, vital importance of his finding a wealthy woman to marry. For both their futures. Garth III readily agreed, as he had no interest in working for a living and, as long as there was a woman in the picture, he didn't really care.

And so, mother and son came back to the United States. Not to Delray, where Selma's parents had long ago died of chicken fever, but to the thriving metropolis of (your town). Selma shrewdly figured that the best place for Garth III to meet wealthy young women was among the patrons of the arts and sought a position that would place them in this select circle. Using her accent, bearing and the cosmopolitan air she'd cultivated, she soon found a job at a newspaper. Her first assignment was as a restaurant critic. Her scathing reviews were responsible for the closure of several fine establishments, many of whom cried foul as she appeared to be more interested in the other patrons and their portfolios, rather than the food.

But she was not to be stopped. The newspaper editors, recognizing that Selma had an undeniable talent, were nonetheless dismayed that some of their favorite expense account restaurants were either closing, or refused to take their reservations. And so, it was decided that Selma would become the opera critic (as most of them hated it anyway). Unfortunately, many of their readers did not. After a guest appearance by Pavoratti, when she compared him unfavorably to Michael Bolton, the editors were stymied over what to do with her. But she was gaining in popularity and her

column was largely responsible for an increase in circulation (and not a few bomb threats). And so she became the art critic. This seemed to work out, at least for several months - as her byline "I don't know art, but I know what I hate" at least prepared readers for the biting commentary that followed. But after one artist threatened to sue the paper when she compared his sculpture to "poorly shaped dog doodoo" it was once again, time to move on. Next came theatre reviews and here, finally, Selma seemed to have learnt some lessons. She toned down the rhetoric, at the begging of the editors and her son, Garth III, who seemed to have developed a sudden passion for theatre. He attended constantly, even went to rehearsals, and Selma for a while was worried about his new obsession. But Garth assured her that he was using his new fascination for the theatre to meet the wealthy daughters and divorcees to be found among the arts' crowd. When she discovered that his true interest was not these, but a penniless actress, Selma chose to use her pen, rather than her mother's sword to 'fix' things.

Giselle Martin had displayed, at a very early age, a talent for singing, dancing, and acting. Even as a toddler, when her contemporaries were having difficulty navigating sidewalk cracks in the trailer park, Giselle skipped effortlessly over them. Her parents, hard-working fast-food employees, recognized her talent and saved to buy her a trampoline. Hours of practice on this opened up even more vistas for Giselle and at age 5 she begged to take dancing, singing, and acting lessons. She was quickly spotted by the owner of the studio, Barbara "Babs" Bernard who began to give Giselle private lessons, taking nothing but coupons for free burgers and fries in payment. The young actress advanced rapidly and Babs knew that before too long, she could no longer teach her anything. With the blessing of Giselle's parents, Babs took the 10 year-old Giselle to New York City to audition her for the prestigious Musical Theatre School of the Americas.

The night before the audition, laying awake in the hotel, Giselle was unable to sleep. The constant noise of the traffic, plus Babs grinding her teeth in the next bed, kept Giselle awake. When she finally slept, it was deep and full of dreams. Awakened by a gunshot in the street outside, Giselle leapt from bed in the dark and forgetting where she was, headed off in the direction of the rollaway bed in the living room of the trailer, where her parents slept. Dazed and confused, she tripped over Babs' suitcase, and flew across the room, landing heavily on the chair that they had wedged against the door.

Babs awoke to find Giselle curled in a ball in the corner, cradling one arm against her body and alternating between clutching her toe and covering her face. Quickly, Babs assessed the damage - a broken tooth, a big toe that was already swollen to twice its normal size, the beginning of a black eye, and a dislocated shoulder. And the audition was less than two hours away! There was no time to find a doctor. Babs got to work. First, she emptied the mini bar and made Giselle drink (and had

a few herself). Then, after giving Giselle a toe shoe to bite down on, with a quick yank, she popped her shoulder back into place. While the girl was passed out from this, Babs made a closer examination of the eye - it was swollen shut. Thinking rapidly, she quickly cut a piece of the quilt lining of her coat in the shape of an eyepatch. The elastic from Giselle's training bra, affixed by safety pins on both sides, became the straps. Babs surveyed her handiwork and then, inspired, snipped sequins from Giselle's audition costume. Using toothpaste as glue, Babs artfully arranged the sequins on the patch. Giselle came to and threw up all over the bed as Babs explained that the patch would make her stand out among the other girls. Giselle smiled gamely, displaying the snaggle tooth. Babs suggested she avoid smiling. There was nothing to do about the broken toe, but Babs suggested she avoid putting weight on it and was sure that her young protege was talented enough to pull it off. With Babs helping her, Giselle dressed and they left for the audition. Giselle found that she was able to limp to the subway, however with her vision impaired, she did have a tendency to walk into doors and walls and she very nearly went head over heels on the turnstile. The subway ride was mercifully short, and Giselle and Babs arrived at the audition.

The hall was lined with young people, each engaged in stretching exercises, vocal warmups, and miming. Their eyes took in the limping Giselle in her eye patch and several of them snickered openly. Babs whispered to the little girl to ignore them and to go about her own exercises. When her name was finally called, Giselle limped to the door, stopping only to give a brave wave to Babs and bump into the wall.

Finally, she was in the rehearsal hall where the judges sat awaiting her. She tried not to notice them as the music started and she did her best to dance (while avoiding using one of her feet) and sing. After a few moments, the judges stopped her and asked what the problem was. Unable to control herself any longer, Giselle tearfully told the story. The head of the committee gently suggested that she try again the following year. As she began to limp sadly out of the room, a foreign voice from the shadows said, "NO. Stop!" Leaning heavily on a tall, silver walking stick a woman emerged from behind the judges. That was Giselle's first introduction to the woman who would become her teacher, the famous Olga Kalinkoff. She approached Giselle and lifted her chin and stared unblinking into her one good eye. "You vill do it again. And you vill do it right. You vill dance und sing." The judges protested, but again, Madame Kalinkoff hissed at her "YOU VILL DANCE!" And when the music began, Giselle did. Something about the strange power of the woman was enough to make Giselle forget the pain and dance and sing. Never had "You're A Grand Old Flag" been done in such a touching way.

Giselle still was not accepted into the school but Olga Kalinkoff became her teacher and a surrogate mother to her. After a quick trip home with Babs, she bade

farewell to her parents while they were on their break at work, packed all her belongings in two small suitcases and headed back to New York City and her new life.

Olga Kalinkoff was born in Russia under the Communist regime. Her mother, Tatiana, was in the corps de ballet of the famous Bolshoi Ballet and her father, Yuri, was a member of the KGB which meant that, by Russian standards, Olga led a privileged childhood. The family had a spacious apartment in Moscow and a dacha in the country. That Olga had talent was evident early on, but her mother was a prima donna, who insisted that the single Kalinkoff spotlight shine on HER. She deliberately ignored her daughter's talent and refused to allow Olga to be trained. Yuri, who was head of the Torture Division of the KGB, was an intimidating presence at work, but a complete pussy cat when it came to his wife. Tatiana ruled the roost and, if she had her way, young Olga would never set foot on the stage. She would, however, let the young Olga watch rehearsals, but only if she would remain absolutely quiet and still and be prepared to tell her mother, over and over again how she was the best one in the corps and it was a shame she was not given leads, blah-blah,blah. What her mother did not know was that Olga not only watched and learnt but at home would secretly practice the steps and choreography. Using a makeshift barre comprised of a broom placed between two chairs, Olga would practice endlessly. Only her mother's maid, Marushka, knew her secret.

By the time she was 16 and enrolled in the Girls Selective Collective School, Olga burned with a desire to dance and began saving her allowance in order to take lessons. Then fate intervened.

It was the opening night of Swan Lake. Yuri and Olga were in the audience awaiting the curtain. Suddenly, Marushka appeared at their seats. A dancer in the corps had been injured. The understudies were all sick from bad caviar. Either a substitution would have to be made or there would be one boy swan without a partner. Marushka had told the Ballet Master about Olga and she was ordered to come back stage. There she auditioned for him, in her course woolen dress and knee socks. Within minutes she was in costume, makeup, and was being pushed out on the stage. Her mother was furious, but Olga's talent could no longer be denied. She joined the corps and within a year was given leads, much to her mother's rage.

For the next five years she danced and was the toast of all Russia, despite a series of accidents that could have ended her career. A sawed-through rung on a ladder. A roller skate left on the steps. A runaway sleigh. A bomb in her car. No one was more solicitous of Olga than her mother after all of these, but soon Olga began to suspect that this was not normal. She decided to expand her horizons and began to focus on acting rather than ballet. She developed the Kalinkoff Method of

acting, which was a cross between yoga, primal scream therapy, and Jazzercise. She also began to plot her escape from Russia and her mother. When the Kalinkoff Academy of the Dramatic Arts traveled to the United States to tour and appear on The Ed Sullivan Show, Olga defected and was welcomed with open arms by the theatre community. Ironically, a mere two weeks after she was granted citizenship, she was mugged in Central Park, leaving her with injuries that ended her performing career completely. But it began what would be her even greater contribution - teaching acting, with an emphasis on musical theatre.

And for years, that's what Olga did - mentoring young actors, teaching and shaping the young Gene Kelleys and Debbie Reynolds of the future. And in each one she searched for the spark, the light, of the talent that she had possessed herself and which had been taken from her too young. And she found it, finally, in a small girl with an eye patch.

In order to provide intense teaching and training, Olga insisted that Giselle live with her in NY. Olga's studio was adjacent to her over-stuffed apartment, filled with mementos of Olga's days of glory in Russia. Every waking moment, Giselle practiced. As she grew older, she began to chafe at Olga's all-encompassing control over her career and life. And she began to press more and more for the opportunity to perform in public. Finally, 10 years after she came to her, Olga conceded she was ready. She allowed Giselle to join the (your theatre name here) - but only in smaller roles. It would be at least another year, Olga said, before she could do leads. But Giselle was not just eager to perform - she was eager to resume a life. She had lived in the insular world that Olga had created (which sometimes included entire weeks spent in mime) and was completely innocent about the world. So she resolved that not only would she act, she would experience life outside the theatre. And she would have her chance - when she came alone to (your town). Olga would join her in a month, but in that month, Giselle was determined to enjoy her freedom. And so it was that the innocent one packed her bags and flew to (your town).

Garth Willsbury III was unhappy. After the excitement of London, (your town) seemed terribly provincial. And his mother was often out late, in her duties as reviewer for the newspaper. He had spent so much time in the (local bar) that there were several bar stools that had plaques engraved with his name. The only consolation was that the ladies of the area seemed to be a freer and less restrained group than his London friends. Still, he felt something was missing in his life. He began taking long walks on the shores of (nearby lake). He roamed aimlessly around the (local point of interest.) But his favorite pastime was to go to the airport and watch the people who were going on trips or returning home.

It was a twist of fate that brought Garth and Giselle together. Garth had roamed the airport and sat with his legs sprawled in a seat near Gate 16. He watched as the passengers disembarked from Flight 452 from New York City. He paid particular attention to the ladies who entered the waiting area first - knowing that these were first class passengers and, ever mindful of his mother's exhortations, scrutinized them for their 'potential.' He had just spotted an attractive woman and was wondering how to approach her when a commotion broke out. A young girl, laden with an overstuffed gym bag and several other packages tripped on the long strap of her purse and fell, knocking over several airline employees and an elderly gentleman in a walker. She appeared unharmed and scurried to apologize to her victims, although she inadvertently swung her purse around and hit the elderly gentleman yet again which caused her purse to burst open and the contents to go scattering in all directions. Garth joined several people in helping her gather her things. She thanked him and them breathlessly and then looked around, seemingly lost. Garth offered to help her find the rest of her luggage and she gratefully accepted his offer.

Together they went to the baggage claim area and watched for her luggage (another unfortunate jostle caused the elderly man to fall on the carousel and make a circuit among the suitcases). Finally, all the other luggage was claimed and it appeared that Giselle's were lost. Not only that, but a quick examination of her purse revealed that Giselle's money was gone. As her eyes filled with tears, Garth, gentleman that he was, came to her aid. He loaded her bags, such as they were, into his Ford Escort and drove her to (local town) and registered her at the (local hotel). Unable to desert the helpless girl, he helped her to her room.

Alone in the room, Giselle sat heavily on the bed and burst into tears. As was only natural, Garth reached for her in an attempt to comfort her. Comfort gradually became something else entirely.

The next morning, Garth looked at the sleeping girl beside him and felt a stirring (along with his usual morning stirring). All of his experiences with women had not prepared him for the strong feelings that Giselle had aroused. Frightened of these feelings, he dressed and wrote a brief note which he left on the dresser along with all the singles from his wallet.

Giselle awoke a half-hour later to find herself alone. She read the note and saw the money. And though she was an 'innocent' her temper flared and she crumpled the money and threw it on the floor. Just then, there was a knock at the door and when she opened it, her face was still flushed with anger. It was Garth, and before she could say a word, he swept her into his arms.

The next few weeks were a blur of love and theatre. They spent every spare moment together. Garth haunted the rehearsal hall watching as Giselle sang, danced, and acted with the company. He told her about Selma and her plans and she told him about Olga. Together, they vowed to find a way to be together, despite the obstacles that would be placed in their path.

Selma found out about the affair while listening in on a telephone conversation between Garth and Giselle. Horrified, she did some research and learned the story of the penniless actress. Without confronting him, she determined to put an end to it, but for once Garth evaded her and her machinations.

Olga detected a new note in Giselle's voice when they spoke on the phone. When she finally arrived it was not just Giselle who met her at the airport, but Garth as well. She knew nothing of this young man except that he could only be a distraction to Giselle and she determined to break them apart - until the first time that she saw Giselle rehearse. For Giselle's performing had an added dimension now - a passion that had been lacking before.

Giselle made her debut with the (your theatre) in (a month previous to the event). Selma was there, with Garth, in order to review. Her review was lukewarm and she had praise for certain parts of the production, but she released her venom on a member of the chorus. (SEE SAMPLE REVIEW on the back page. You can use this as a model to write your own. It can either be a completely fictitious show, as the one we used, or a real show.)

It was horrible, it was mean and venal. It could very well end Giselle's career before it even began. She could not be consoled. But soon something even more momentous happened that pushed theatre and the review and everything else from her mind. She missed her period and started blowing breakfast. If his mother hated her so much now, what lengths would she go to keep Garth away in the future. And how would they live?

Garth was puzzled. He had seen enough theatre to know that his mother's review was completely unwarranted. Not being a rocket scientist, it did not occur to him that his mother may have found out about their affair. He considered confronting her and confessing but each time he attempted she subtly reminded him of his 'obligation' to find a rich wife. After all, she said, their only real asset was the insurance policy on her life.

Olga was furious. She knew of the connection between Garth and the critic and she quickly figured out that his mother knew of the affair and this was her way of stopping it. She began to see parallels between Garth's mother and another mother who had determined to ruin a young dancer's career and life.

Wilhelm was on a world-wide brewery tour, which brought him to (your town and location of event. Ours was at a brew pub, hence the references to that). His visit coincided with a fund raiser for the theatre.

And so, our cast of characters arrive at the event. But some mention must be made of one last person who will play a part in the drama.

Rocky McDonough was a young officer with the (your town) Police Department, after graduating 23rd (out of 25) in his class from the Police Academy. A certain reluctance to place himself in danger plus a tendency to fall asleep during stakeouts plus an affinity for doughnuts and beer (though, thankfully, not at the same time) did little to further his ambitions. After a singularly undistinguished career, he retired in 1990 and held a series of unremarkable positions until he found what would be his dream job - as a security guard at the (location of your event). He takes THIS job very seriously and is constantly drawing his gun to prevent altercations.

SCENES & CONFRONTATIONS

The following describes some tips about interacting with the audience. We use these techniques during the improv sections of my other shows. But since the vast majority of the “action” in CRITICAL REVIEW takes the form of confrontations and scenes between characters, it’s especially important for this one. Number One Rule - involve and engage audience members as much as possible.

The first (and probably most important) part of this is getting attention. You may not get everyone’s attention, especially in a mingling, party-like setting, but in that case, you simply re-do the scene (with variations) several times in different parts of the room. (If there is a dinner at your event, it is much easier to do since people tend to stop eating and watch.)

Confrontations, as much as possible, should be done in areas where the characters are separated, at least at the beginning. In other words, try to avoid having two characters begin a scene standing close to each other. Yelling from across the room is an immediate attention getter. Obviously, this is not always possible, because of the nature of a particular scene, but it’s a good general rule. Otherwise, you may find yourself acting your little heart out and no one is paying attention.

Another great attention getter is a chase. Two or more characters have a disagreement and one runs away (usually crying). Another goes off in pursuit. The quarry should use other audience members to hide behind, and maybe enlist their help to keep the pursuer from finding them.

Throwing drinks is a fun, fun, way to get attention. There is something so totally melodramatic about it and it's one of those things seen in the movies but rarely in real life. (Use only a teensy bit of liquid. It's amazing how wet you can get with a scant 1/4 cup of water.) Ending an angry confrontation scene with a drink toss is very effective.

You may also notice that people can be shy initially. There is a good chance that, at the beginning of an event, anyway, they will not approach the characters. It's up to the actors to draw them into the scene and the action. Your actors should not be reticent about going up to a group and, after apologizing to them for interrupting, getting them directly involved. One thing we do a lot is enlisting the aid of an audience member (or group) and send them on an errand to another character. "Please, help me out! See that guy over there? Can you find out his name and where he's from?" There are some other things, within the description of the event, that will also give you ideas. But do not be limited to what is in my description. This is improv and your actors and how the audience responds to them will provide on-the-spot opportunities (some of them hysterical).

Another great way to draw in the audience is to have each character find good sports within the audience (or find them out ahead of time) and use them a lot, by name. The more people who know him/her the better. For example, say that one character finds an audience member ("Frank Walters") that is giving them a rough time (in a kidding way). All night, that character will use "Frank Walters" as a reference point. They can have an entire group go over to "Frank Walters" and tell him to stop picking on the character. They can have the group yell, in unison, from across the room, "Go home, Frank Walters." Another example is using someone whose occupation is appropriate (or, even better, wildly inappropriate). Say you have an audience member ("Jane Smith") who's an attorney. All evening, invoke the name of "Jane Smith, she's a lawyer" to settle disputes. Using audience members, by name, is very popular and becomes a running gag for the evening. (And they LOVE to be singled out this way.)

On a related note, if you can find out personal information about individual audience members ahead of time, work it in as much as you can. This can include things they get teased about, hobbies, sports, etc. Because there is a musical theatre angle to the story, it is especially fun to find references to those for your improv. Singing snatches of songs, etc., can really add to the fun.

REHEARSALS

It may seem that, with few lines and little blocking to learn that you can dispense with rehearsals. Au contraire. Rehearsals are vital to get the cast working together as a team, developing their characters, and, most importantly, allowing them to

discover new things to bring to the improv scenes. You will discover that, by rehearsing the confrontations, etc., your actors will hit upon wonderful lines, wonderful “bits” to add, and wonderful ways to play off each other. The descriptions of the scenes which follow are just the starting point.

And I would strongly suggest having the entire cast at rehearsals, rather than working on individual scenes. Some of the best ideas you may get will come from other actors besides those actually involved in the scene.

Rehearsals are also a good time to plan out the sequence and timing of your scenes. When we had this settled, I made cheat sheets for the actors that capsulized the entire event on one page.

And, finally, even though it is the only scripted scene, you do have to rehearse the solution scene with each of the suspects taking turns being The Guilty One. You could just agree on one solution ahead of time so that the “vote” is moot, but I don’t recommend it. (Not playing fair!)

LOGISTICS

You obviously will need to scope out the location of the event to see how you will stage your scenes, the murder, and where to present the final solution scene.

When you are doing this, be sure to secure a “safe room” that is nearby where the audience will be. This is where actors and crew keep props and personal items and it’s where you will practice the solution scene with the chosen audience member. (You’ll see what I mean as you read on.) It’s also where actors go after they run crying/angry/scared from the room. And, obviously, it’s where the “dead people” go. If there is dinner involved, this can be where the cast and crew will eat.

A few words about FOOD. When it is a sit-down or buffet dinner we have sometimes had an arrangement whereby the actors are scattered among the tables. This is not my favorite, actually. The actors have found that after a few minutes it is a strain for them and their table mates to keep up the pretense. I’ve found that most people want to eat and REALLY converse, rather than feel that they have to entertain or be entertained.

We’ve also done it where the actors/crews eat at a special table. The big problem with that is that some characters would not conceivably want to eat with some of the others. Can’t very well fight with another character and then sit down and ask them to pass the butter. And so it breaks the “reality” - however dubious the “reality” of a mystery event!

Another argument against eating in the same room as the audience is that your actors will actually be working during dinner, doing little scenes. What I've found works best is to eat in the safe room and ask to be served FIRST. That way actors and crew get fed, actors can do their during-dinner scenes and return to their food.

If this is a sit-down fancy-schmanzy fund raising dinner, you can very easily see your profits being... er... eaten up by giving free dinners to a cast or crew of 12 or so. It is always in my contract that my cast and crew be fed. But this does NOT have to be the same thing as the audience - especially if they are paying a lot per ticket. I simply require that the cast and crew be fed something good and substantial. Another argument for eating away from the audience - so they can't see you dining on pizza while the paying guests are chowing down on butterfly wings under glass. For events where dinner is served, some scenes can occur before and some during the meal. Keep the ones during dinner brief and try not to interrupt too many times. If the dinner is a buffet, always try to do your scenes for a) people waiting to go through the line and b) people who are done eating and waiting on those who are not. As much as possible, avoid intruding on those who are in the midst of their meal. Experience has taught me that most people want to eat and converse with their tablemates. I keep interruptions at a minimum - just enough to maintain the flow and flavor of the event.

When checking out the location, you will also need to discover how to do the murder. How will the characters exit after the big pre-murder scene? From where will the shot be fired - which also dictates how Selma will enter? We like to do nice loooooong death scenes, with the mortally wounded making a big circuit before collapsing to the floor. Where will that happen? How will the actors return to the room to discover Selma dead? How will you get the body from there to the safe room? What route will you take?

Finally, the one and only actual scripted scene is the solution. It's the only one that needs to be played in full view of everyone. Decide the best place for this to happen. Another note on the solution - GET EVERYONE'S ATTENTION BEFORE STARTING. Nothing is more annoying than to have some group jabbering in back while everyone else is trying to listen. I ask for everyone's indulgence and explain that the solution will only take 5 minutes and could we please have quiet from everyone for that long.

THE EVENT

Please note: The scenes are described below with times attached. This is for clarity purposes only. Obviously, your time frame may differ. Also, the ORDER in which they are given may change. Finally, remember that in a mingling situation, some scenes may need to be repeated for different groups of guests.

We performed this show in a mingling-type party with food stations and that's the way the scenes are described below. You'll need to adapt accordingly if your event has a sit down or buffet dinner. References to the "bar" can obviously be changed.

NOTE: There is an audience member who figures prominently in the solution. You will need a good sport who isn't shy, has a big voice and who is very enthusiastic about playing a small role. If you can pick out someone from the guest list ahead of time and talk to them prior to the event, it is very helpful.

6:00 - Call for actors/crew.

7:00 - Guests arrive. As they do, they see Garth and Giselle engaging in some not-so-subtle, not-so-tasteful displays of affection. If there is a registration desk, that's the spot to place them.

7:15 - Selma arrives and drags Garth away. He can't stand up to her. Giselle is angry and runs off. Selma circulates introducing self and Garth. Asks women if they are single or married to a rich guy "And is the marriage in trouble, dear?" Her son is in a most unsuitable relationship and she's attempting to introduce him to some 'nice' women. Garth is embarrassed and tries to slip away to the bar. Selma drags 'potentials' over to meet him. He apologizes to them, says he's sorry but he loves another.

MEANWHILE, Wilhelm arrives and circulates, introducing himself. He spots Selma and has an immediate reaction. He inquires of all - who is that woman? What is she doing here?

AND Olga arrives and seeks Giselle. She finds her only to have Giselle running away in tears. Olga also spots Selma and is furious. Do they know what she wrote about her Giselle? She recites it verbatim, and passes around copies of the review. She encourages people to go up to Selma and condemn her.

7:45 - Big scene - Olga, Selma, Garth. Olga confronts Selma over the review. Selma defends it. Garth attempts to intervene, citing how he thought "that young actress" was pretty good. Olga asks how Selma can do this to a young budding performer who is just starting out and how she left her homeland, Russia, just to escape this kind of cruelty. Rocky breaks it up by drawing his gun. (Rocky is always drawing his gun and announcing "I have a gun.")

FOLLOWED BY . . .

Giselle does not feel well and faints dramatically, caught by several guests. Garth rushes to her side after being summoned by Rocky. She recovers but has to rush from the room before she throws up. This can be repeated with different groups.

AND

Wilhelm confronts Selma. “Don’t you remember me?” She denies it, and he persists, following her for a few minutes. Also can be repeated.

AND

Wilhelm joins several groups under the auspices of talking beer. But now he is even more interested in Garth III, than Selma. He gets people to find out how old Garth is, his birthday, and where he was born. Recognizing that Garth is probably his son, he attempts to embrace him. Wilhelm will spend a great deal of the evening attempting to hug Garth. Garth spends a lot of time avoiding just that.

AND

Garth has been showing around pictures of his “Dad” which will set off ‘alarm bells’ in the minds of those who see them. SEE PROPS.

8:15 - Big scene between Selma and Rocky. “Colonel Klink” is stalking her and harassing her son and she wants Rocky to put an immediate end to it. He tells her to calm down. She asks the crowd if it isn’t true that the German guy was asking about her and her son. Gets some people to admit that. Rocky doesn’t think that’s a crime and attempts to calm her down. She will have none of it. Ends with Rocky agreeing reluctantly to find this German and handle it. Takes out gun and starts searching the crowd.

FOLLOWED BY

Giselle fainting again. She asks people to call for Olga. She tells them to yell for Olga. Olga comes immediately, pushing people out of her way. Garth arrives too, but Giselle wants nothing to do with him. Rocky shows up with gun drawn. Can be repeated.

AND

Rocky warning Wilhelm to leave Selma and her son alone.

FOLLOWED BY

Wilhelm approaching Garth and attempting to embrace him.

8:45 - Big scene involving ALL. Begins with Garth fighting with his mother and saying he will NOT stop seeing Giselle and nothing she can do can stop him. She points out that he has no money and would not be able to support her. Olga joins in - Giselle will not need anyone to support her if her career is not impeded by ignorant critics like Selma and begins to rant about that and how mothers have ruined more young lives than anything else. Giselle joins in - none of this will be a problem because she is no longer interested in Garth who is just a mama’s boy and she wants to find herself a real man - like that German over there. Wilhelm reacts

with a “who me?” and then says that the young man (and he gets teary-eyed here) seems to be a wonderful fellow and that, no doubt, if he’d only had a father’s guidance he would have been fine. Garth is insulted that anyone would think that his father wasn’t a good father. Scene ends with Giselle saying she’s gonna be sick and fake throwing up in Selma’s handbag before running from the room. Garth and Olga both go after her. Selma and Wilhelm both go after Garth. Rocky follows, with gun drawn.

8:50 - Rocky returns, sans gun. He circulates, saying he couldn’t find any of them and by the way, has anyone seen his gun?

9:00 - Two gunshots are heard. A few moments later, Selma staggers into the room, bloodied from two bullet wounds in the back. Rocky takes charge. He yells for body removal and says he’s going to find the suspects and his gun. Nobody is to leave. Body removal team goes into action. NOTE: Selma has two identical blouses. She wears the first while circulating. When she exits before the murder, she changes into an identical one that has been bloodied and has “bullet holes.” Rocky returns with suspects and makes several announcements. HE MUST HAVE THE ATTENTION OF ALL before he starts. Using a microphone for larger crowds is almost a must. He informs the audience that

- 1) The suspects will be available for questioning.
- 2) There are important questions you need to ask the suspects. He informs the audience how they can discover those questions (see below).
- 3) At 9:30 there will be a “detection election” and they will be able to cast their ballot for who they think “done it”.

THE QUESTIONS

WAS SELMA EVER IN GERMANY?

- Garth knows about this - was right before she came to England and met his dad. Opportunity to talk about ‘dad’ and how his parents had separate bedrooms also Garth II’s love of flowers also all his parents’ male friends.
- Wilhelm also knows about this. He won’t come right out and tell people that it was Selma. Just this young, innocent American girl he loved and lost.

WHO STANDS TO PROFIT FINANCIALLY FROM SELMA’S DEATH?

- Garth and Giselle both know about this. Opportunity to talk about his mother’s insistence that he marry well.

WHAT ENDED OLGA'S DANCE CAREER?

- Olga knows this. Opportunity to talk about her mother, too.
- Giselle also knows this and about Olga's mother. And how Selma was just the same kind of mom.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH GISELLE?

- Garth and everybody else (except Giselle) will comment on the fainting and nausea spells she's had that evening.
- Olga and Garth will know how she hasn't been feeling well in the morning.
- Giselle will blame the review she got from Selma and how ever since she's been sick over it. Olga will confirm it.

WHO WILL INHERIT WILHELM'S BREWERY?

- Wilhelm knows this. He does not have children, or at least any that he knows about. Opportunity to tell of his twin and how he only came into his birthright after the twin died and until then, he was penniless. Measles story.

FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES

You can find ways to increase your fund raising by using this part of the event. Whatever you decide to do, you can have Rocky describe it while giving his instructions.

If doing a silent auction, there are a few ways to encourage "traffic" in this area. Having the suspects stationed there for questioning is one way. Placing the questions on cards in among the auction items is another.

You can have guests "buy" the right to ask the suspects questions by bidding. Anytime they place a bid, they are given a "pass." Each pass entitles them to ask a question. (The suspects collect them as they ask, so that they'll need to bid more in order to be able to continue asking questions.)

If doing a raffle, you can do something similar. For every ticket they buy, they get a "pass." Or anytime they buy a raffle ticket, they can be sent to a secret locations where they will find the questions to ask.

If there is an oral auction, this is the time to do it. The auctioneer can add a "bonus" in order to get the bids up. "I have \$25. Next bidder gets to ask a suspect a question."

The “detection election” can itself become the raffle. Audience members must purchase raffle ticket “ballots.” They place them in the ballot box of the suspect they think “did it.” Whoever receives the most raffle tickets will determine “whodunit.” Their solution scene is the one that is played. Prizes will be drawn from that box. You can also draw from the ballot box of the suspect who got the LEAST number of votes and award gag prizes. Or, after determining “whodunit,” the raffle tickets can be lumped in together before drawing.

DETECTION ELECTION

9:30 - 9:40 Rocky announces that it is time to vote. You can do this several ways. One way is to have ballot boxes with the suspects’ names on them. Another is to have the suspects circulate with their own ballot boxes or bags. Guests should cast their ballots in the bag of the suspects they think are guilty. (The Production Manual covers this, and sample ballots are included in the Production Package.)

9:45 (or when done) Suspects gather in safe room, determine whodunit and run that solution scene. NOTE: This is when you should run the solution scene with the chosen audience member AND HE IS GIVEN TWO GUNS (one is Rocky’s.)

9:50 Rocky announces that the election is over and the results have been tallied. If necessary, he clears the area where the solution scene will be played. He asks for the indulgence of the audience by remaining quiet for 5 minutes.

9:55 Solution scene. Following this is . .

10:00 - Cast is introduced, raffle drawings, etc.

SOLUTION SCENE(S)

No matter the voting method, the solution scene played will be determined by who gets the most votes.

THE SOLUTION SCENE IS COMPRISED OF THREE SECTIONS. SECTIONS ONE AND THREE ARE THE SAME FOR ALL SUSPECTS/CHARACTERS. THESE ARE INCLUDED HERE. SECTION TWO IS NOT. IF YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE THE ENTIRE ACTING COPY BEFORE MAKING A DECISION ABOUT PRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT US:

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SECTION ONE - the same for all solutions

ROCKY: Okay, okay, okay. Can I have your attention please? (*Calls for quiet until he gets it.*) A serious crime has been committed here this evening.

GARTH: (*sobbing*) My poor mumsy.

OLGA: Bah, I vaste no tears on dis beetch.

GISELLE: Oh, Garth. Darling.

WILHELM: Murder iss a terrible ting.

ROCKY: Murder? Wha (*confused*) Murder???. . .I meant someone stole my gun. That's a bad thing. I'm a security guard and I know these things.

GARTH: Whoever stole your gun must have murdered mum. The bastard.

OLGA: Bah, do you forket vhat she said about mine Giselle in de newspaper. She deserf to die.

WILHELM: Ya, dere iss dat. In Chermanny, ve haf saying "Vot goes in der circles, vill come back to bite in der butt."

GARTH: Stop it! She was my mum! You terrible, terrible man. How horrid you are!

WILHELM: (*Crying*) Oh, mein Gott. I am so sorry, Gart da Turd. Please forgive dis olt man. (*He crosses and tries to hug GARTH, who evades him.*)

GARTH: Stop it! I say, what IS wrong with you, you silly sausage!

ROCKY: And you, Garth III (*he says one-one-one.*) Did I hear something about you inheriting from mum?

GARTH: Inherit? No, I won't have anything. Well, except for the insurance policy. It was all that we had left after poor Daddy. Now I'm an orphan.

GISELLE: Garth, darling. Don't bring that up. It gives you a motive.

WILHELM: Maybee you are not der orphan. Gart, my little man. (*He crosses again to him with arms outstretched, but GARTH evades him*)

again.)

GARTH: I am getting seriously, as you Yanks would say, "creeped out."

GISELLE: Garth, darling. Didn't you ever wonder why it was that your parents had separate bedrooms?

GARTH: Um, no.

GISELLE: And why you didn't look anything like your father?

GARTH: Well, maybe a little.

GISELLE: And why he would disappear for weeks at a time? (*Garth shakes his head 'no.'*) When the fleet was in?

GARTH: You mean. . . (*the light dawns.*)

ROCKY: Oh, I get it. We had a guy like that on the force. Designed his own uniform.

OLGA: Ah, it was a marriage of convenience.

GISELLE: And where was your mother, right before she came to London?

GARTH: Wha. . .oh, yes, Germany. You mean. . .(*Everyone looks to WILHELM who opens his arms expansively.*)

WILHELM: Come to papa, mein little boy. (*He crosses again to him but GARTH pushes ROCKY into his path and WILHELM winds up embracing HIM.*)

ROCKY: (*disentangling himself*) So, you had a motive to kill Selma as well, Mr. Beer Baron. She stole the son you always wanted.

WILHELM: Yavowl, I had motive - but I did not do.

GARTH: Well, neither did I. She was MY MUM!!

ROCKY: Yes, but you will get her life insurance money.

OLGA: It iss strong motive.

ROCKY: How about you, Madame Kalinkoff?

OLGA: Meeps??

ROCKY: Yes, youps. You hated Selma for the rotten review she gave Giselle.

GISELLE: Oh, Olga, you didn't, did you? Even if she was mean and evil just like your own mother? Say you didn't do it.

OLGA: Okay, I vill say. I did not do. I am innocentski.

GISELLE: Thank God. Oooh. *(She starts to sway.)* I feel faint. *(She swoons and GARTH catches her.)*

OLGA: Giff her air.

GARTH: Give her some water.

WILHELM: Give her a beer! Zat vill do der trick!

GISELLE: *(recovering)* No, no. No beer.

ROCKY: Can I guess why not, Miss Giselle? I recognize the signs. *(Gestures a big belly on himself.)*

GISELLE: No, no. . . . I mean. . . . Oh, Garth darling, I was going to tell you.

GARTH: Tell me what, darling?

GISELLE: I'm. . . I'm. . . I'm pregnant.

GARTH: Really, darling. *(Trying to make the best of it, though clearly dismayed.)* Why that's. . . that's. . . that's ripping! We are going to have a little Garth IV? *(He says Garth I-Vee.)*

WILHELM: Und I am going to be der grandpapa! Oh, mein son *(attempts to embrace GARTH.)*

GARTH: *(Holding up hand.)* Back off, Fritz.

WILHELM: Haha. I am not der Fritz. I am your Papa Wilhelm. But you can call me Willy. *(“Villy”)*

OLGA: Vhat???. But zee song, zee dance, zee theatre. You cannot be a star vit der big belly, Giselle.

ROCKY: So you would need Garth to take care of you, eh Giselle. And he couldn't do that without the insurance money.

GISELLE: What?? You think I . . .you think I . . .but. . .that's. . .that's. . .that's. . (she is at a loss for words.)

ROCKY: Ridiculous?

OLGA: Stoopid?

GARTH: Absurd?

WILHELM: Verstuchen?

GISELLE: Exactly!

ROCKY: Well, it had to be someone here. Maybe one of them (*indicating audience. The others react with "Aha's. Yes - THEM."*) If we only had the gun. (*To the audience.*) Alright, folks, I don't want to get tough, but I have no intention of losing this job and going back to Home Depot. No one leaves here until I get my gun back. I don't care if I have to do strip searches of all of you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I give up. Here it is. (*He/she comes onstage. ALL ad-lib until he/she joins the group.*)

ROCKY: (*taking gun.*) Hold it right there. What's your name?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: _____

ROCKY: Why did you kill Selma? Come on, we've got you cold. Spill it.

ALL: Yes, why, why?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (*denies it.*) I didn't kill Selma. Someone asked me to hold the gun.

ALL: Who???

SECTION THREE - the same for all

GUILTY ONE: (*grabs gun, said in appropriate accent and with any colloquialisms that are appropriate*) Stand back. You'll never take me alive. She deserved to die and I'm not going quietly. I have the gun.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (*who has been positioned to the other side - ROCKY will help - holds up another gun and then sticks it in his back.*) Ah, but I have another one. Give it up.

GUILTY ONE (*drops gun, which is retrieved by ROCKY.*) Oh, dammit. I hate amateurs.

ROCKY: I declare this mystery officially solved.

END OF PLAY

PROPS/COSTUMES

Pictures of Garth II for Garth III to show. These are pictures of a gentleman of the appropriate age. But they are somewhat "odd." There's a shot of Garth II wearing an apron while puttering around the kitchen. Another could be Garth II with some of his sailor friends. Another one might be Garth II proudly showing off his needlepoint. NOTE: If you want to avoid the gay angle entirely, you'll need pictures of a gentleman who is the absolute total physical opposite of Garth III. And Garth II will have to emphasize how it was odd - he didn't look like his father at ALL. And you will need to change some of the lines in the solution scene.

Walking stick for Olga

Loud stage gun to 'shoot' Selma

Two little guns that don't have to shoot. (One is Rocky's)

Holster for Rocky's gun

Bloodied blouse Selma

Identical blouse, unbloodied for Selma.

Extra blood

Ballots

Ballot boxes or bags

Copies of Newspaper clipping (review) for Olga to pass out.

Tablecloth to cover body

Stretcher or some other form of body removal.

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Selma "head
shot" here

Production Sparkles Except. . .

by Selma Willsbury, Theatre

The (insert theatre name here) gave a sneak preview of its latest musical production, "Dollhouse!" which is based on a play by a Mr. Ibsen (Who should keep his day job - whatever that might be.)

But, despite the thin story line, there is much to be happy about in the production. The tap dance numbers are snappy and well-executed. The toe-tapping patter song "Nora Times Nine" reminded me of some of the best moments from "Nunsense" (great praise, indeed!) The touching ballad, "Trouble for Torvald" not only was beautifully sung but also gave great insight into that character. (Torvald is Nora's husband and bit of a charivari. The actor playing him, however, let's just say hubba-hubba!)

"Dollhouse!" is, for the most part, a successful effort by the _____ Theatre and director _____. I can't say I like huge groups of people singing and dancing which seems to be a disturbing trend in modern musicals. (I blame Sondheim.) But that's a minor quibble.

A larger quibble would be the performance (and I use that term VERY loosely) of a minor character played by newcomer Giselle Martin.

The small role she plays is in direct juxtaposition to the major damage she inflicts on the show with her ineptness. While trying to concentrate on the other actors, my eye was constantly drawn to Giselle Martin, whose clumsiness was only matched by her appalling lack of talent.

Ms. Martin, who obviously MUST have a relative on the (insert name of theatre here) Board, is, unfortunately, reason enough to avoid "Dollhouse!" The beautiful costumes, including an intriguing use of polyvinyl, were wasted on Ms. Martin, who lurched unsteadily around the stage like Elizabeth Taylor at the Golden Globes. The evocative, otherworldly lighting could only have been improved by providing a black-out space for Ms. Martin to do her ungainly gyrating. Indeed, "Dancing In The Dark" would be a fitting number for Ms. Martin.

The program indicated that an upcoming production of "Waterworld The Musical" will feature Ms. Martin in a pas de deux. As my dear lamented dead husband, Garth Willsbury II, would say, "Please, please, pas de DONT."

A printed copy of this review is sent with Production Materials. For a small fee we will send it electronically in Microsoft Publisher format so you can make edits and insert the head shot of the actress playing SELMA

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