

'Death by Design' ranks among season's best

*For the uninitiated,
Brumder Mansion
is worth seeing*

By JULIE MCRAE
Post Theater Critic

MILWAUKEE — Fifteen years ago I began reviewing shows in the basement of Brumder Mansion when this charming bed and breakfast on 31st and Wisconsin in Milwaukee offered shows regularly. After Carole Hirschi sold the house in 2007, and it was bought by a California couple, Tom and Julie Carr, in 2008, the basement was refigured and refurnished to accommodate theater works as well as provide an entertainment space for music concerts, art exhibits, open-mic events and even weddings.

It is a beautiful, intimate space. The mansion is an aesthetic wonder, if you appreciate architecture and a tasteful mix of the old and the new.

"Death By Design," by Rob Urbinati, the comic mystery now being presented, matches the quality of the mansion. The script is clever, the characters well-conceived, the actors flawless, and the direction masterful. I have already earmarked it as one of the best of 2015, and we're only in the first quarter.

The play is set in on the outskirts of London, and its flavor reminds one of Noel Coward and Agatha Christie with a bit of the satiric edge of George Bernard Shaw thrown in for good measure. It is extremely funny with a good bit of suspense thrown in as well.

The mix of characters include a self-impressed playwright and his fiery actress wife, a crafty maid and a womanizing chauffeur, a priggish self-righteous politician, a rabid socialist, a kooky artist, and a myopic schoolteacher.

At a glance

"Death by Design"

If you've never visited the unique theater at the Brumder Mansion, 3047 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, this show would be an excellent introduction to it. It will close for Easter but resume its run April 10 to 12 at 7:30 p.m. Call 414-388-9104 or visit www.brumdermansion.com.

The plot involves jealousy, rage, revenge, and love, of sorts. It also has its commentary on marriage, theater and politics.

The dialogue is so clever that one almost has to stop laughing so as not to miss the next word. There is some physical humor as well, all well executed in a relatively small space and a helpful set of stairs.

The set design by Tom Marks is posh and functional with three means of entrances and exits.

Who killed Walter?

The central question in the play is who killed Walter? Everyone seems to loathe the man and his pompous pronouncements. Saviors are usually unbearable. Marcus Beyer is perfect in the role.

Sorel, the actress he comes to visit, played by Alicia Rice, is histrionic and insatiable when it comes to being pampered and adored. Rice aces it. Her husband Edward is absolutely superbly rendered by Eric Williams Jones. I'm still smiling as I think back on his performance.

The two servants, Melody Lopac (Bridgit) and Cory Jefferson Hagen (Jack), are a delight to watch. They seem to know more than anyone else. The three other unannounced

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visitors include the outrageous artist/dancer/spiritualist Victoria, a friend of Sorel's. Keighley Sadler captures this character's zaniness and volatility. Eric, played by Hugh Blewett, is a sorry little creature with a fierce passion for social justice. He maintains his fierceness despite being tossed about a good bit. We like him.

Lastly, Alice, a jealous girlfriend of the chauffeur Jack, intrudes upon an already complicated scene and adds to the chaos and the surprise ending. Liz Faraglia takes on this challenging role as she gropes about in her semi-blind state.

Director Zack Woods deserves a lot of credit, for even though he had a wonderful script and eight talented actors to work with, he still had to pace the show and bring out the best in both. He definitely did.

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Submitted photo

From left are "Death by Design's" cast Hugh Blewett, Alicia Rice, Eric Williams Jones, Keighley Sadler, Cory Jefferson Hagen, Melody Lopac, Liz Faraglia and Marcus Beyer in the Brumder Mansion in Milwaukee. Film critic Julia McHale already rates the play as one of the best for 2015.



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Health Tip of the Week



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Blood Sugar & Dementia Risk

Diabetes is an established risk factor for dementia. However, new research suggests that even in people without diabetes, above-normal blood sugar levels may increase the risk of dementia. Researchers tracked more than 2,000 adults, average age 76, (most of whom did not have diabetes) for seven years and found that any increase in blood glucose levels was associated with an increased risk of dementia. The higher the blood sugar levels, the greater the risk. The good news is that another study showed that even a 15-minute brisk walk 30 minutes after a meal can help lower blood sugar levels.

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