

You Can't Take It with You

Brings Laughs to WCP

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY

WESTFIELD – There are plays that are serious, thought-provoking, and deep. The three-act Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman play *You Can't Take It with You* isn't one of them. The Westfield Community Players' production of this 1937 Pulitzer Prize winning wacky comedy that played to a nearly full house on opening night brought laughs, entertainment, and loads of good old-fashioned fun.

At first glance at the playbill, it may look like no audience could possibly figure who is who and what the relationships are since this boasts a cast of 18. Not true. We first meet the Sycamore family through the mother, Penelope (Sharon McGuire) who is upstage pecking away on a manual typewriter, writing a play. She is typical of almost everyone in the household who has hobbies that they are pursuing but who aren't very good at them. Her daughter Essie (Christie Storms) has just made a batch of candy, but her real passion is ballet, so whenever we see her, she is flitting and twirling. But even her Russian ballet teacher remarks of her efforts, "She stinks!" The patriarch of the family is Martin Vanderhof (Tim McGovern) known to all as Grandpa. He and his philosophy of "do what makes you happy" permeates the household. Granddaughter Alice (Anastasiya Shpilevskaya, making her American debut) has fallen in love with the boss's son Tony Kirby (Trevor Henderson). So far, no real drama.

But as the story unfolds, we see that grandpa's extended family and a cohort of fascinatingly weird folks make this place an anomaly to a "normal" household. Son-in-law Paul Sycamore (Paul Grote) is enamored with fireworks which he and a man named Mr. DePinna (Greg Northam) design and assemble in the basement of the house. Mr. DePinna delivered ice to the house some eight years and never left. There is a terrarium of snakes in the living room, and an odd assortment of objects ranging from a suit of medieval armor,

and a collection of photos, a xylophone, and a printer that looks like a waffle iron. Linda Correll's set design takes top prizes with her stenciling that looks like wallpaper, use of a fainting couch, Tiffany lamp and other period perfect furniture.

Throughout the evening and the next week, visitors Boris Kolenkhov (Ed Bontempo), Essie's Russian dance teacher and a host of other guests – invited or not, appear and cause mayhem and hilarity in the 1930's home.

Three act plays are not something in vogue for today's audiences. The current Broadway play, *The Roommate* by Jen Silverman, a two-hander with Mia Farrow and Patti Lupone, runs 90-minutes at the Booth Theater. That's the same theater where this play entertained audiences for almost 900 performances. This uplifting comedy, though, with its lifeaffirming credo and silly, madcap humor, struck a chord with American audiences not only recovering from the Great Depression, but on opening night in Westfield gave the contemporary crowd a good laugh. Director Viel made the wise choice to merely have a pause between the first and second act and then an intermission between the second and third act.

Standout performances include The Grand Dutchess Olga Katrina played delightfully by Kathy Gordon, Tim McGovern's Grandpa with his droll asides and zingers, Sharon McGuire's portrayal of kooky Penny, and Ed Bontempo as the zany Russian ballet teacher. Mrs. Kirby (Kathy Quin-Vaccari) is perfectly uppity, and her husband is played convincingly by David Baker. The chemistry between Mr. Henderson and Ms. Shpilevskaya is red hot. This female newcomer to local theater is an actress to watch.

Bravo to the team who helped mount this gargantuan show: producer Kay Macrae, stage manager Carolyn Campen, lighting/sound designer Don Schlachter, and set construction Robert Palladino and Jackie Hartley.

This is really an ensemble effort of actors whether in a walk-on or lead. There's nothing more fun for an actor than to develop the mannerisms, accents, and personality of an unconventional



DANCE IT OUT...Anticipating her new boyfriend's arrival at the Sycamore house, Alice (Anastasiya Shpilevskaya) asks her eccentric sister, Essie (Christie Storms), to stop dancing and Grandpa (Timothy McGovern) to keep his pet snakes out of sight in Westfield Community Players' production of the comedy *You Can't Take It with You*. Courtesy of Carolyn Campen

character. These actors were allowed to go full throttle on the wackiness. The classic farce fulfilled director Linda Viel's dream of directing the piece which she shared had been on her bucket list for years. During intermission, she chatted with an audience member who identified himself as the son of the playwright Moss Hart. Chris Hart came from Montclair to the opening night performance to see how his father's work has withstood the test of time. He told Ms. Viel he was impressed with the production to which she replied, "Well, you certainly have made my night!"

For tickets to the show that runs through October 26, call [\(908\) 2321221](tel:9082321221). Tickets may be purchased at wcptheatre.org or at the door half an hour before the 8 p.m. curtain.

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