

'Producers' is loaded with gut-busting laughs

Written by Deborah Stone

Having seen the amazing duo of Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane appear on Broadway in Mel Brooks' Tony award-winning musical, "The Producers," I was a bit hesitant to review Village Theatre's rendition of this iconic show.

I shouldn't have worried. The Village's production is dynamite, due to a killer cast, under the ever-competent helm of director Steve Tomkins, with perfect-pitch music direction by Tim Symons and Bruce Monroe and dazzling choreography by Kristin Holland.

Based on the original 1968 movie of the same name, "The Producers" tells the story of Max Bialystock (Richard Gray), a once-famous Broadway producer who is now down-on-his luck, and his stage-struck accountant, Leo Bloom (Brian Earp).

When Bloom inadvertently discovers that a producer can make more money off of a flop than a successful show, Bialystock eagerly enlists his help to find the worst play ever written, hire the absolute worst director and offend all of New York City before skipping town with their ill-gotten old-lady cash.

The show is loaded with gut-busting laughs, courtesy of Brooks' outrageously zany one-liners and the well-seasoned comedic chops of an exceptional cast.

Funny man Richard Gray is at the top of his game as the charming, but shamelessly greedy and scheming Bialystock, while his partner in crime, Earp, holds his own as the neurotic, angst-ridden Bloom.

Both men are triple-threat performers – gifted singers, actors and dancers. Joining them in this hilarious romp is local favorite, Jessica Skerritt, as Swedish bombshell Ulla. Skerritt is utterly ravishing with legs that go on forever.

She's got the voice, the attitude and the slinky moves to boot, and it's hard to take your eyes off her whenever she graces the stage.

Other scene stealers include the terrifically talented David Anthony Lewis, as the former

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Nazi-turned-aspiring-playwright credited with "Springtime for Hitler," the show Bialystock and Bloom believe is guaranteed to offend just about everybody.

Lewis, in his Village debut, makes his mark in a big way, leaving audiences wanting to see more of this new talent. He takes an already ridiculous character and makes him even more outrageous, seizing every opportunity for a laugh, from his accent to his facial expressions, to his singing, dancing and impressive physical comedy.

And then there's Village veteran Nick DeSantis, whose portrayal of the overly effeminate director Roger Debris is completely over-the-top.

DeSantis throws himself into the role, thoroughly committing to its flamboyance and lunacy.

He is well-complemented by Chris Ensweiler, as Carmen Ghia, Roger's "Common Law Assistant," who flounces and swishes around the stage as if he owned it.

Props go to the entire ensemble, who dance and sing the numerous and ambitious show-stopping numbers with high-octane energy and enthusiasm, displaying more than a few scene-stealing moments themselves.

"The Producers" is at Village Theatre in Issaquah through July 1 before moving to its Everett location, where it will run July 6-29.

For ticket information, contact the Village Theatre box office in Issaquah at (425) 392-2202 or (425) 257-8600 in Everett, or visit: www.villagetheatre.org.