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# The Uncertainty BLUES

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## Copenhagen

by **Michael Frayn**

Directed by **Wes Martin**

Off Center Productions

Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, Peoria

(602) 840-7800

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\$25.00 - \$31.00

**Wes Martin** has returned, bringing “theatre for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” to the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts with his new company **Off Center Productions**. His shot across the bow of the stodginess that has become Theaterworks (with whom he is associated, but not owned—despite appearances to the contrary on the website) is **Michael Frayn’s** talking heads play *Copenhagen*, a musty bit of historical brain-teasing that only a bunch of history buffs, physicists, and pseudos can enjoy. Like me. Did nuclear physicist Werner Heisenberg (**David Weiss**) really hold up the Nazi atomic program? Was it because of his visit to his mentor Niels Bohr (**Ken Milder**) and his wily wife Magrethe (**Adrian Burrell**) in Copenhagen in 1941? Is this really important? While the play sounds like so much intellectual wanking when described, the implications of this heady play are astounding. Frayn, better known for his comedies and farces, has written an

interesting script suspended within way too much deep thought. It is Martin and his cast's job to bring life to a thin-lipped, nearly bloodless evening. Despite many obstacles, the production succeeds—to a point.

He wisely keeps the play on its feet, which keeps the eye engaged even as the brain is taxed. He has the actors do their best at keeping the vague notions understandable. The play is long-winded, but he strives to make it less obscure.

The performances strive as much as Martin to breathe life into this elongated theorem. Weiss is the most naturalistic as the cocky, haunted Heisenberg. The lines believably come from him. He connects with the other two very easily. Milder is less comfortable in the skin of the mild mannered Bohr. He seems physically uncomfortable, and the choices he has made for movements and ticks don't come across naturally. He talks a good game, but his presence feels hesitant, especially during some of the more stagy moments. Burrell is a staid matron, rigid and controlled as Margrethe should be. She finds the moments of passion and regret beneath her character, and she does a good job of balancing her two men.

**Richard Hardt's** set is a warped blackboard in Einstein's curved space. It's a fine concept but its many theorems drawn on the board can sometimes prove distracting. **Terry DeMars'** lighting is basic, unobtrusive, while **Rob Evans'** sound design is more supportive. Burrell's costumes successfully recall the era and support character.

This is an odd choice for a fledgling company, because so few people would be attracted to the description of the show. This production is pretty successful in its mounting of this intellectually ambitious script, but based on the problems with attendance that have been plaguing the show, this may have been a case of

overreaching aspirations this late in the season. If this type of brainy material interests you, this should prove a worthwhile choice.

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