

Not Worth Peeking in a Keyhole For

Mark S.P. Turvin

goldfishpublishers.com

mspt@goldfishpublishers.com

What the Butler Saw

by **Joe Orton**

Directed by **Ross Collins**

Fountain Hills Community Theater, Fountain Hills

(480) 483-1664

June 17th - July 10th, 2005

\$11.00 - \$15.00

The first of the two British farces that will comprise **Fountain Hills Community Theatre's Summer Stock Season** thudded from the gate on opening night. **Ross Collins** has committed the cardinal sin of directing a show in which he is the lead. In a drama or simple comedy, perhaps this can be pulled off with a lot of help, but in a sex farce like **Joe Orton's** drastically tamed (by Samuel French, not Collins) ***What the Butler Saw***, the traps are plentiful. In either role, I'm certain that Collins would shine; he's a very funny man with a canny sense of comedic timing and he's proven himself as a director. The problem is trying to pull off two full time roles at once: Too few cooks spoil the soup. While Collins was busy concentrating on his own line delivery and performance, the show got away from him. His cast is inferior with no connections between them, his blocking pedestrian, and the pacing drags with hesitations, missed cues, and dropped lines. A director on the other side of the footlights would have been able to rectify this, but Collins seems to have depended on his actors, and they failed him.

As Dr. Prentice, there are lots of hints of the potential of Collins' comic abilities. This head of an asylum is played as the straight man in an outside world crazier than those locked up. His initial response to an interview for a secretarial position by Geraldine (**Christen Erber**) is to have her remove her clothing for the interview. The intrusion of his nymphomaniac wife (**Katrina Reyes**) and Nicholas, the bellboy of the hotel who seduced her the night before (**Aaron Bradbury**) puts the kibosh on his amorous intentions. The unexpected arrival of Dr. Rance (**Jeffrey J. Davey**), a crazy hospital inspector, throws the nuthouse into a panic. Eventually, most everyone, even a Bobby (**Ukiah Odom**) winds up in various stages of undress and in clothing of the opposite sex, a lot of doors slam, and the ending is as contrived as it is silly.

Collins spent most of the time mumbling his sarcastic asides and half-heartedly stumbling around the stage to cover his indiscretions. Still, he found time to pull off a few zingers. Davey has a few moments as his power-mad government official cracks, but he was the largest cause of the dropped lines. Reyes' Mrs. Prentice is a portrait of mugging, and she never seems intent on talking to her fellow actors. Erber's dingbat blonde is exactly as you'd expect, and little more. Bradbury's slummy bellboy is a walkthrough. He starts off with a real attitude, but it dissipates fairly quickly and he reduces his already flat role to the depth of a point when he goes for the laughs. Odom is pretty good until he needs to join the craziness, when he goes for the obvious. The cast struggles mightily with their accents, and the loser is the British Isles, despite the work of dialect coach **Diane Senffner**. The collective manages to come up with a few enjoyable moments, but just as things seem to gel, another awkward pause or dud line stops it once more.

Peter J. Hill and **Vanessa Davisson's** set has a nice clubby look, and Hill's lighting is effective. **Patricia Tonzi's** costumes are better the more people are wearing, which isn't necessarily a good thing for a sex farce. Her creation for Erber is actually rather unflattering.

Some of this may improve as the cast works together, but I don't see it getting markedly better. If people remember their lines, actually listen to each other when they're supposed to, and ace more of their punch lines, this could move from awkward to solid.

-30-