

House and Garden: Success times two
One cast on two stages equals double the odds to overcome...at once

The cast and crew of House and Garden by Alan Ayckbourn presented by the Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre, deserve a standing ovation for successfully managing two shows simultaneously without any sign of disconnection from either audience or breakdown in communication with each other or technical failure of any kind. Directed by Andrew S. Paul (House) and Melissa Hill Grande (Garden) at the Stephen Foster Memorial, these productions give opportunity to explore marriage, family, community and the effect each of these have on each other as the decisions of each character affect all other characters in some way. These affects are to varying degrees but no less evident, reminding us that theater is an imitation of real life: our individual choices impact some lives more than others, but impact others nonetheless.

The affluent may have better homes and gardens but this may just mean fancier settings for the kind of behavior expected from the not so well to do. Money can't buy happiness and certainly doesn't spare those who have it from infidelity, insanity, heartlessness or selfishness. But "that's life, I suppose," says the Platts.

Teddy Platt (Martin Giles) is torn between family legacy and his failure to carry it on. His wife Trish (Helena Ruoti) is caught between family tradition and self-assertion. And this is only part of the chaos in the Platt House and surrounding village. Every relationship encountered is dysfunctional, from the teenagers Sally and Jake (Anwen Darcy and Sean Mellott) to the Platt house staff, Izzie, Pearl and Warn (Mary Rawson, Sarah Manton and Jon Farris) to the neighbors, the Maces (David Byron Jackson and Beth Hylton) and the Loves (Michael Fuller and Tressa Glover). The Platt House seems to bring out the worst in everyone, including the guests Lucille Cadeau (Nike Doukas) and Gavin Ryng-Mayne (Leo Marks).

The players portray each character precisely as imagined, both in physical attributes and in personality. This is the mark of a well casted show in my opinion and a display of actors who know how to make good choices about the roles they play. Teddy (Giles) is believably as complicated as he is embarrassingly out of touch. Both Trish (Ruoti) and Gavin Ryng-Mayne (Marks) are prime examples of the holographic nature of our being: seeing the same person from a different angle can alter our perception of them. Joanna Mace (Hylton) gives a disturbing visual of a woman scorned while Sally (Anwen) gives us the typical teenaged, self-centered, brat with the addition of a natural affinity for politics.

Though the issues addressed in these productions are quite serious, the comic relief sprinkled throughout comes across as natural and not as ridiculous attempts at humor.

The set of House is so well constructed that it gives the illusion of an abode as peaceful as it is beautiful. The walls painted to match the blue sky beyond the glass front, French doors has a calming effect, that is, until the space is darkened by the revealing of the character's flaws. Mrs. Platt opens the doors to let in the sunlight and the house is illuminated shedding light on the storm brewing within.

Hope springs eternal but the fountain in the Platt garden does not spring much at all. The focal point of Garden's set, the fountain is the perfect symbol of lives clogged by inner and outer conflict: selfishness versus selflessness, apathy versus empathy, legacy and tradition versus autonomy. If the fountain could talk, there would be much to say about human frailty. Granted a glimpse at this frailty, we sit in the midst of this lovely garden, a very impressive outside-in space.

The wonderful thing about these productions is that they can stand alone but they are in my opinion better together. Seeing both House and Garden give a greater appreciation for the inherent difficulties the actors must overcome to play two stages at once.

Delana Flowers is a multi-talented creative. She is a Positively Pittsburgh Live reporter, a dynamic vocalist, an amazing Actress, and an independent writer. Delana is owner of Ingenuity by Delana Flowers ©, writing effective copy so you don't have to. Services include copywriting for newsletters, blogs, ad copy, marketing pieces, articles, reviews, invitations, postcards, flyers and more.