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ENG 363

Dr. Sullivan

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A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder

*A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* was truly an original production. There has never been another production like it. Montague, Monty, Navarro, learns upon his mother's death, that he is an extended heir of the D'Ysquiths to the Earl of Highhearst. Driven by his upset at his mother's exile from the family and disinheritance due to her marriage for love and not money, Monty sets off on a mission, eliminating all the living eight relatives standing between him and the throne. Montague D'Ysquith Navarro hysterically and absurdly went about this quest to inherit his position as Earl of Highhearst, leaving the audience roaring with laughter the whole time.

Each situation that Monty encounters is absurd. Every heir inadvertently reveals a way in which he or she could die that would seem to the outside world to be an accident. One heir he kills by pushing over the edge of a rooftop after the heir reveals how deadly the fall would be; another died from copious amounts of bee stings after revealing that it would be possible to die from enough stings as well as revealing that bees are attracted to a particular scent. Each scenario, however, can be construed as an accident so that it is never traced back to Monty as a suspect; in fact it is never learned that the heirs were murdered. That is, until the very last heir is mysteriously poisoned at a dinner party, causing his untimely demise. Ironically, for this murder Monty is accused but he did not commit it.

Possibly the best part of the killing spree of the heirs was that every heir was played by the same actor, including the women, named Jefferson Mays. The actor did a superb job with his quick costume changes and his quick change of character. Each heir was unique, over the top, and quirky; he or she had his or her own personal flare that had the audience booming with laughter. Perhaps my favorite heir was Henry D'Ysquith, a flamboyant man whom Monty sang a duet titled "Better With A Man" that was filled with hilarious sexual innuendos about male companionship, complete with uncomfortably close dancing between the two characters. Another excellent character was the heir that was obsessed with traveling to other countries to offer her charity. Monty sends her to three separate places in which she would be facing grave danger, but she seems to avoid death in all three locations. Monty has to take matters into his own hands and chops down a dock that she is standing on so that she drowns, finally dying. His attitude toward this scenario is that of frustration; it adds humor to the show because he feels no remorse for these killings. In fact, many of them he does with a smile.

Another interesting subplot is the romance between Monty and Sibella, a married woman with whom he has trysts, and the developing love between Monty and Phoebe D'Ysquith, the sister of the late Henry, the one who died from bee stings. Despite having the opportunity to marry Monty, Sibella chose a rich man that bored her, but could support her lavish lifestyle. The irony lies in Monty's acceptance of Phoebe D'Ysquith's marriage proposal. Part of him accepts the proposal to spite Sibella but another part of him accepts for genuine attraction to Phoebe. Upon learning about his acceptance of the proposal, Sibella begs Monty to call the engagement off but he refuses. In the end of the

play, the two women, who hate each other, come together in order to trick the legal system into granting Monty his freedom. And, to add insult to injury, instead of having to choose between the women, like most story lines, Monty ends up with both women, not having to choose. This element added to the absurdity and originality of the play. An interesting parallel that I noticed between the two love interests was that they often mirrored each other's actions. They would be separated by a wall on stage but be doing very similar actions. They also both wore similar dress styles, with mermaid style skirts. At the dinner banquet they both attended, the costuming choices were interesting. Phoebe was dressed in an innocent pale blue, innocent-looking gown whereas Sibella wore a dark red sparkling and seductive gown. The symbolism between the two women here added to the tension of the mistress and fiancée being in the same room.

The staging of this show was intriguing. Because it is presented as Monty recounting his memoirs from prison, the stage was set up with another smaller stage on it. Monty would walk in and out of the scenes as he was recounting them. I thought this was a very effective way to do the staging. It gave the sense that the audience was watching a show within a show. It allowed Monty to distinguish between the past and the present throughout the show. The stage was utilized very well. I enjoyed how the show was not only a recounting, but also met up with the present where the audience learned about Monty's fate as it was happening.

An interesting theme in the play is that the women seem to be the ones that save Monty. Sibella and Phoebe come together to get Monty out of jail and Miss Shingle, a maid for the D'Ysquiths, is the one who poisons the Earl of Highhearst, the final person

standing in Monty's way of becoming Earl and also the person Monty is accused of murdering. If it were not for these strong women, the outcome of the trial might have been drastically different. I find it interesting that the two women who he has a weakness for end up saving him, despite their strong distaste for one another.

Realistically Monty D'Ysquith Navarro is not a very likable character. He murders seven people, has an affair with a married woman, becomes engaged himself, but continues to have an affair with the woman he truly loves. Yet the audience finds itself rooting for Monty the whole time, who is only motivated by his dead mother's exile from her family. In reality murder of seven people would not be justified by this motive. This just adds to the absurdity of the play. *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* is a wonderful show that leaves the audience happy. As a feel good musical, there is not a dull moment from the music to the actors to the absurdity of the plot line. This musical will leave a long lasting impression on anyone who chooses to go see it.