

# Arts & Entertainment

## Alliance Repertory Theater's *Something in the Air* Proves Greed Never Goes Out of Style

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

EDISON - Contemporary theater usually speaks of topics and issues that plague our culture. Alliance Repertory Theater is always on the cutting edge of timeliness in the selection of their shows. *Something in the Air* by Richard Dresser, a two-act play that opened this past weekend at the Edison Valley Playhouse, zeroes in on America's ubiquitous need for money and reveals the power of greed in every man.

Playwright Dresser said in an online Q and A in Dramatic Publishing.com that "Greed never goes out of style." And his play, in the style of film noir, is about what happens when a decent man buys into a "sure-fire" insurance investment. The term film noir (French for "black film") was named for its downbeat subject matter: crime, double crosses, femme fatales and the presentation of the seedy side of life.

"I was watching those great forties movies about decent men swept up in

a dizzying web of corruption, seduced by beautiful women, played out against a stark urban landscape and ultimately fighting for survival," the playwright said. "That kind of highly theatrical approach seemed perfect for what I wanted to write about: a culture obsessed with quick and easy money."

*Something in the Air* is more spoof in its execution than pure film noir format. It is grotesquely funny while offering a fresh look at the way people make decisions based on twisted values. Robert Scott Sullivan plays Walker, a man who—on the requisite "dark and stormy night"—has hit rock bottom in his life and staggers into what he thinks is a doctor's office.

Neville (John Correll), really a shady power broker, offers Walker a "can't-miss" financial opportunity, which, you guessed it, misses. Specifically, Walker gets into a guaranteed investment scheme to buy a terminally ill man's life-insurance policy. Walker merely needs to pay the man's bills before he dies and wait for the inevitable to happen to collect the windfall.

It is a diabolically brilliant plan except for the sticky wicket fact that Cram (Gus Ibranyi) does not die. Complicating things, instead of seeing the ill man only as an investment, Walker befriends the sickly, mean-spirited Cram. Meanwhile, our schnook of a main character Walker falls in love with a hooker named Sloane (Liz Samuel).

He dimwittedly sees a future with Sloane and buys her an expensive engagement ring that hurls her into the arms of depression. Imagine that. When Cram inexplicably starts to get well, Walker's desperation for his investment to pay off grows, so he hires a highly moral Pollyanna, Ms. Holloway, a registered nurse (Kelly Maizenaski) and plays mind games with her to get her to poison Cram under the delusion of being a compassionate person who is merely

helping this poor man die with dignity.

Director Michael Driscoll, as usual, has picked a quirky, little-known work that is bizarrely delicious. It's a vehicle that allows his five actors to play deadpan, break into madness and just basically have a great time playing these weird characters. Veteran actor John Correll has a number of hilariously dark lines that he milks like a small-time Kansas farmer on his morning rounds in the cow barn.

Mr. Correll is especially droll in the country club dining room scene in which he gloats that a spear of asparagus costs \$75. Main character Robert Scott Sullivan, in Walker's fake cashmere coat, is an interesting leading man. A cross between Cliff Clavin and Norm from TV's "Cheers," he sports old-fashioned glasses, a crew cut type hairdo, baggy pants and embraces bumbling idiot mannerisms. Although we want to slap him silly at first, as he gets sucked into depths of immoral behavior, we start to see him through slightly more forgiving eyes.

Liz Samuel's character Sloane is truly psychotic and when she talks about her brother, we wonder if she's going to be taken away in a straight jacket right then and there. The playwright's raw look at pathetic human condition is magnified in the character of Cram, played to a tee by Mr. Ibranyi who looks possessed early on and has a diabolical laugh that should be recorded to scare away pesky trick or treaters on Halloween night.

The most gloriously played role is portrayed brilliantly by Kelly Maizenaski as nurse Holloway, who has a high-pitched voice and a buoyancy of spirit that makes one think she's on some of her patients' mood elevators. What she's able to do with the character's transformation sets Ms. Maizenaski in a lofty class by herself.

Unfortunately, with Dresser's film noir genre, the numerous scene changes become laborious even though crew and/or actors hustle to make them fly. Perfect musical interludes selected by director Driscoll aid the blackout voids, but the intimate stage could have been better arranged so that only Ed Pearson's lighting could affect one second location changes.

The resolution to the play is a bit too easy with everything tied up like bows on birthday presents, so do not go expecting to see a spectacular morality play. Go to see some pretty spectacular acting.

AT A GLANCE: *Something in the Air* presented by The Alliance Repertory Theater at the Edison Valley Playhouse, 2191 Oak Tree Road, Edison, N.J. 08820. For ticket reservations, call (908) 755-4654.



DON'T BE LATE...Roosevelt Intermediate School students Julian Mazzola, Jessica Zimmermann and Isabella Gelfand rehearse for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The show runs October 21, 22 and 23.

## Roosevelt to Present *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*

WESTFIELD - Roosevelt Intermediate School will present a modern version of the classic story, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Adapted from Lewis Carroll's beloved novel, the show follows Alice as she journeys through a bizarre and hilarious world where big is small, flowers talk, and the tea parties are "mad."

Performances will be at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, October 21, and Saturday, October 22. There also will be a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, October 23.

"We are taking an old-fashioned classic and bringing it to 2011," said the show's director, Kimberly Jonny, who is also a drama and public speaking teacher at Roosevelt. Ms. Jonny said that she and the cast are updating the show to make it even more fun for modern-day audiences. "Don't be surprised if you hear a little Justin Bieber!" she added.

A portion of the show's proceeds will go to Brookside Place Elementary School in Cranford, which was heavily damaged by the flooding associated with Hurricane Irene.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* stars a cast of talented Roosevelt 6th, 7th and 8th graders, including: Jessica Zimmermann as Alice, Frank Guerriero as the White Rabbit, Madeline Hudelson as the Mouse, Alison Jaruzelski as the Mock Turtle, Rachel Matessich as Lory, Annie Condodina as the Dodo, Alexandra Jackman as the Red Queen, Isabella Gelfand as the Queen of Hearts, Sarah Boyle as the Caterpillar, Kate Helander as the Duchess, Margaux Natiello as the Cook, Allie Safanov as the Cheshire Cat, Jason Starita as Tweedledee, Alex Campbell as Tweedledum, Blake Fallon as the Mad Hatter, Jack Ritter as the March Hare, Alex Frisch as the Dormouse, and Sara Frankel as the White Queen.

Other featured cast members include Liam Kudlick, Abbie Hurvitz, Julian Mazzola, Eve Crandall, Pamela Burke, Greta Crandall,

Madelyn Metzger, Maddie Kevelson, Chrissy Harvey and Sidharth Eleswarapu. Also appearing are Grace Ascione, Lauren Brumfield, Samantha Greenaway, Grace Mastronardi, Gianna Morrello, Victoria Napolitano, Nicole Sollazzo and Alex Vitale.

Roosevelt Intermediate School's production of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, is fun for kids of all ages, and sure to draw a large crowd. Tickets are reserved seating. So, as the White Rabbit might say, "Oh, Dear! Don't be late! Get your tickets now!"

Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door. To purchase tickets in advance, contact Judy Augustino at judyandalan1@verizon.net. In addition, Roosevelt students will be able to purchase tickets during lunch periods on the Thursday and Friday before the show.

All shows will be performed on the main stage of Roosevelt Intermediate School, which is located at 301 Clark Street in Westfield. Refreshments will be sold before the show and during intermission.

AT A GLANCE: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* presented by Roosevelt Intermediate School can be seen Friday, October 21, and Saturday, October 22 at 7:30. There also will be a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, October 23.

## Westfield Art Association to Host Artist Liz Demaree

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Art Association's next meeting/demonstration will be on Sunday, October 16, from 2 to 4 p.m. Artist Liz Demaree will demonstrate manuscript illumination. The meeting is open to the public and takes place in the Community Room at 425 E. Broad Street in Westfield and is accessible by a ramp for the disabled. Refreshments will be served.

Liz Demaree will demonstrate manuscript illumination in a way similar to the way medieval books of hours were produced in the 12th-15th century.

After a brief overview with illustrations of various kinds of illumination throughout the ages, she will show how oak gall ink was made and the gold leafing process. Historically correct pigments and gum arabic will be painted on calfskin, as opposed to using watercolor from tubes. The different effects of various pigments, which are unlike modern paints, will also be shown.

Liz has studied Medieval Manuscript Illumination with Karen Gorst, who is affiliated with The Morgan Library, as well as the NY Center for Book Arts. Additionally she has taught workshops at the Baird Center in South Orange, The NJ Visual Arts Center and the Hunterdon Museum. She has also taught sixth graders for 5 years at The Far Brook School in Short Hills.



DEADLY DECISION...Nurse Holloway, (Kelly Malzenaski) who cares more about others than herself, wrestles with a dilemma of whether or not to speed up the terminally ill Cram's (Gus Ibranyi) death in *Something in the Air* by Richard Dresser. The two-act "film noir" play is presented weekends through the end of the month at Edison Valley Playhouse.

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DEMONSTRATION...Artist Liz Demaree will demonstrate manuscript illumination in a way similar to the way medieval books of hours were produced in the 12th-15th century at the Westfield Art Association meeting/demonstration to be held on Sunday, October 16.

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