

'Postmortem,' A Sherlock Holmes-style murder mystery entertains at Tater Patch Theater



Chance Walters, 19, plays "Bobby" in the Tater Patch production of *Postmortem*.

The cast of *Postmortem*, now at the Tater Patch Theater (l-r) Ginger Rosen, Audrey Kirsten-Lewis, Steve Lewis, Alex Nawrocki, Ellen Painter and Dezarea Brown.

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There's a murder taking place at the Tater Patch. And, you'll be guessing until the end who the murderer is.

In the Tater Patch Players' current production of *Postmortem*, you'd better be ready for anything; gunfire, daggers, blood, storms, séances and (grim) humor.

Postmortem, a play by Tony Award-winning playwright Ken Ludwig, is a wonderfully acted Sherlock Holmes-type murder mystery that opened this past Friday night at the classic Tater Patch Players Theatre on Old Philadelphia Lane.

The Tater Patch Players, directed by the multi-talented Nan Nawrocki, serve up an entertaining evening with a plot that has as many twists as Burnt Mountain Road - and most of them you won't see coming.

The story revolves around a group of actors who work for leading man William Gillette, an actor in the 1920s who has become famous by playing Sherlock Holmes in many productions on Broadway. Gillette, played artfully by Alex Nawrocki, has some surprises for his guests. Be forewarned, about as soon as you think you've got Gillette figured out, you'll have to guess again.

The cast has been invited to Gillette's 1922 mansion, and the action takes place in the living room of Gillette's home. The perfect-for-period set design drew "oohs and ahhs" from the crowd when the curtain went up last weekend. The set, complete with a hide-away liquor cabinet, also includes swords and daggers on the wall, antique mirrors, a table that hosts a séance and a 'terrace' where some of the production's more "violent" special effects take place. The show's set and production elements were largely the product of Bob Countryman, a 28-year resident of Pickens County, whose production skills have been honed over a career in theatre spanning

nearly 30 years.

The play moves quickly with a virtual non-stop flow of dialogue (pay attention, as you might pick up some hints along the way as to "whodunit") and some well-executed sound effects and stage choreography. The action, capably directed by Ms. Nawrocki and assistant director Patrick Hall, will have you moving your head from side-to-side just to keep up, especially during the intensity of *Postmortem*'s final scene (forget that second glass of wine, you won't want to miss the ending of this one!).

The cast of eight (four men and four women) is outstanding. The lead role is played by Mr. Nawrocki, who played the same character several years ago in the Blue Ridge Community Theatre. His strong, imposing stage presence and kinetic energy are central to the production's success, and his lines (and those they set up for the other characters) are delivered effortlessly and with just the right amount of understatement.

The other cast members were equally memorable. Audrey Kirsten-Lewis of Talking Rock plays the role of Marion Barrett whose constant badgering of her beleaguered husband Leo (played by her real-life husband Steve Lewis) lends some of the production's funniest moments.

Ms. Kirsten-Lewis' facial expressions (many in response to her husband's odd behavior) add to both the humor and intensity of her character. Mr. Lewis, whose physical appearance is part Hal Holbrook and part Anthony Hopkins, is a pleasure to watch and his character delivers some of the play's best lines.

The cast includes a young couple in Gillette's troupe who have also been invited to the mansion for the weekend. Characters Bobby Carlyle and May Dison are played, respectively, by teenagers Chance Walters and Dezarea Brown, two extraordinarily gifted young actors.

Walters, playing the part of Carlyle, shows a forceful stage

presence at the age of 19. He is joined by the promising young actress Dezarea Brown whose portrayal of May Dison was dazzling. These relative newcomers to the Tater Patch stage promise a bright future for upcoming productions.

The cast is rounded out by two experienced actresses, Ginger Rosen (who plays Lilly, the aunt of William Gillette) and Ellen Painter, who plays Louise, the former roommate of a woman who died in Gillette's house one year ago to the night. Rosen has been in theatre in the Atlanta area for some 20 years, and has been in Jasper for nearly 10, appearing in *Driving Miss Daisy* and *Play On*, among many others. She is perfectly cast as William Gillette's dotting Aunt Lilly.

Painter's portrayal of the red-headed actress Louise is both poignant and, especially as the play evolves, entrancing. She most recently starred in *Lend Me a Tenor* and *Dixie Swim Club*, and has acted in regional theatres and in New York City. Both Ms. Painter and Ms. Rosen bring a professional, Broadwayesque feel to the Tater Patch. Their acting was riveting.

All of these actors figure centrally into the twisting plot as the play moves through its two acts, and the roughly two hour production (including a 20 minute intermission) moves along at a fast pace. Saturday night's show was close to a capacity crowd - and the audience's loud and sustained applause continued after the curtain closed showed its appreciation.

The Tater Patch Players are all (unpaid) volunteers, and they each wear many hats. Besides his considerable skill in production and set design, Countryman was also at the ticket booth when the theatre opened its doors this past Saturday night.

Ms. Kirsten-Lewis, who played Marion, also did much of the costume design for this period piece, which was evident in the long gowns and formal attire that accompanied the early 1920s

setting.

Ms. Nawrocki, the director, has been heavily involved in Tater Patch since 2002, and directed more than 15 plays including *Guys and Dolls*, *The Producers* and *The Fantasticks*. She has also acted in several others. She told the *Progress* that she would leave the theatre late Saturday night after the show, then return on Sunday to audition actors for Tater Patch's next production, *Little Shop of Horrors*. When you're in the Tater Patch, things never slow down.

While discussing the plot of *Postmortem* might give too much away, let's just say it will keep you guessing right to the end. You will not only be entertained by this fine group of actors, but the theatre-going experience is exceptional (yes, beer and wine are available, as well as "Jasper's best popcorn" and other goodies, which not only can you enjoy in the lobby but, unlike many theatres, you can take inside to enjoy during the play).

Plus, where else do the actors hop down off the stage at the end of the production to meet and thank their audience? A perfect conclusion to a delightful evening.

Postmortem runs through September 6. See if you can figure out whodunit!

More details are available at www.taterpatchplayers.org