

Theater

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Underpants is a Fabulous Farce

by Chad Young, Managing Editor, Nashville Parent Magazine

Picture it: Dusseldorf, Germany, 1910. A young woman, married to a bombastic husband working as a government clerk, attends a parade to see the king. As he nears, she stands on the tips of her toes to catch a better glimpse when suddenly the unthinkable happens—her underpants fall to her ankles. Although she quickly retrieves them, it's too late. She's the scandalous talk of the town much to her husband's chagrin.

Therein lays the backdrop of Tennessee Repertory Theatre's *The Underpants*. This highly hysterical farce is the perfect way to end the Rep's 2007–2008 season. It's not a show to take your children to, unless they are 16 or older, but it is a wonderful date night outing with your significant other!

Based on *Die Hosen*, a 1911 comedy written by German playwright Carl Sternheim, the current adaptation by Steve Martin (yes, THAT Steve Martin!) boasts quick-wit dialogue, double entendres and side-splitting humor.

Veteran stage, TV and film star Lane Davies directs *The Underpants*, and the audience truly experiences his perfect, magical touch. This is a Broadway-caliber production from start to finish, and the top-shelf cast seamlessly work together to create an amazing performance with much aplomb.

The show features some oddball characters that delightfully fill the stage with passion and hijinks. Rep favorite Marin Miller plays the leading role, Louise Maske, who suffers the unfortunate incident at the parade. This is her most successful role to date. She plays her character with a convincingly coy, yet calculating, fervor at the idea of committing adultery with an energetic suitor who waxes poetic in her presence. Further, she masterfully commands the audience's sympathy as she basks in her new-found fame in contrast to her mundane first year of marriage that is void of passionate spark.

Marc Silver makes his triumphant Tennessee Rep debut as Theo Maske, Louise's husband, and the delivery of his staunch character is a real comedic backbone to the production.

Patrick Waller shines like never before playing the role of Frank Versati, the purple-clad poet who finds his muse in the young, underpants-derailing Louise. Waller's physical comedy effervesces on stage along with the funny, dramatic flair he injects into his character's dialogue. Likewise, Bobby Wyckoff (Benjamin Cohen) and Sam Whited (Klingelhoff) deliver on-the-mark performances. And while it's only a little more than a cameo appearance, it's a real treat to see Davies take the stage.

Supporting actress Martha Wilkinson is hilarious as Gertrude Deuter, the tawdry tenant living in the Maske's home who encourages Louise to take a lover so she can live vicariously through her. Wilkinson is a skilled talent who never misses a beat.

Scenic designer Gary C. Hoff outdoes himself with the elaborate stage set, which features intricate detail appropriately capturing the period and setting. Michael Barnett's lighting skill is right on target. Not too much or too little. It's just right for enhancing the set's mood throughout the show.

The Underpants ends the Rep's current season on a definite high note. Do yourself a favor and escape into 90 minutes of constant laughter you won't soon forget.