

Playcrafters' Latest Showcases an Enchanting Ensemble: "Enchanted April"

Written by Mike Schulz
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"It's a shame it all has to end," says our heroine, Lotty (Karrie McLaughlin), at the end of Playcrafters' *Enchanted April*. I completely agreed. The production currently running at Moline's Barn Theatre is unexpected in the best way possible: Who knew this light, frothy, harmless little romp could be this intoxicating?

Like its 1992 movie precursor, the *Enchanted April* stage script – detailing the comic foibles of four British women who time-share an Italian villa in the spring of 1922 – is sweet and amiable and funny and even a little touching. Its slapstick doesn't quite mesh with its sentimentality, but it's a perfectly likable show nonetheless. Yet Playcrafters'

Enchanted April

is nearly transporting; the leading actresses, under the inspired guidance of Jennifer Kingry, go at their roles with such delightful comedic and romantic fervor that I don't think I stopped smiling once. Except, maybe, when it had to end.

Among all the shows I attended this past weekend, I think my favorite memories will be of the faces of *Enchanted April's* Karrie McLaughlin and Patti Flaherty. McLaughlin has the good fortune to be playing, for much of the show, a transcendently happy woman, and it suits her; this actress exudes a natural radiance, but she's a sensationally talented performer to boot, carrying the show with ease and precision. And Flaherty possesses such tremendous comic timing and is so dexterous in her character's transition from caterpillar to butterfly that you eagerly await her every appearance. Together, McLaughlin and Flaherty are light-comic perfection.

Nearly matching them are Katie Consamus and Stephanie Naab, who complete the effervescent comedic quartet. Consamus' languid sexiness and sun-drenched delivery are like a tonic, and Naab is exquisitely, imperiously funny; she's doing less Joan Plowright than Dame Edith Evans in *Murder on the Orient Express*, and it's safe to say the audience loves her for it.

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The women aren't the whole show in this *Enchanted April*: Craig Michaels is devastatingly, hysterically snippy as Lotty's husband, Joshua Kahn is endearing as the villa landlord, and, again, Playcrafters' technical design is topnotch, with lovely costumes, sound effects, lighting, and one of the best set-reveals I've seen in a long time. (Honestly, people *gasp* at the start of Act II.) This entire production is as crisp and cool as a late-summer evening, and for a couple of hours every weekend, the Barn Theatre is the most unabashedly romantic venue in the area.