

## The Lady Vanishes: "Catch Me If You Can," at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre through June 15

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 11 June 2008 02:21

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"Life's full of surprises."

These were among the first words spoken from stage during the opening-night presentation at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre. Yet while this sentiment would've sounded perfectly appropriate coming from one of the characters in the comedic mystery *Catch Me If You Can*, it was actually a statement by the show's director, Kevin DeDecker, who preceded the performance with an announcement: Actor Mike Skiles had fallen ill, and his role as Inspector Levine would be assumed, that evening, by the production's stage manager, Drew Carter - a young man who would be carrying his script in hand, and would also be making his (accidental) stage *debut*.

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I routinely enjoy Mike Skiles' performances and certainly hope he's feeling better, but I'll admit feeling rather jazzed by this unexpected turn of events, as I'd worked at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse during a two-month run of *Catch Me If You Can* in 2003, and consequently knew whodunit even before the "it" was revealed by playwrights Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert. I also knew, as those unacquainted with the show likely didn't, just how big a deal this actor substitution was; with the exception of the play's lead, no performer carries a heavier load than the one portraying Inspector Levine.

So on behalf of what appeared to be a most cheerful and satisfied audience, allow me to offer Carter hearty congratulations. Not only did he make it through Thursday's presentation with aplomb, but did so with such sweetness, relaxed charm, and sharp comic instinct that I, for one, am already looking forward to his next stage performance, accidental or otherwise; if Carter was at all terrified, he didn't let it show for an instant. One of the great joys of theatre, of course, is that you never know what's going to happen even when you *do* know what's going to happen, and in Richmond Hill's *Catch Me If You Can*, watching Carter create a wholly entertaining figure with no prep time was the second-greatest thrill of the evening.

Before getting to the show's single-greatest thrill, though, allow me to nutshell *Catch Me If You Can*'s opening

minutes, which find

Al Whitmore's Daniel Corban enlisting the aid of Carter's detective; following a minor spat during their Catskill Mountains honeymoon, Corban's new bride has driven off in her husband's Corvette, and has subsequently gone missing. And that's as much of the plot as I'm willing to divulge, as the production reminded me that audiences new to the piece seem to get as big a charge from its setup as from its resolution. Suffice it to say that Corban's quandary winds up involving a mysterious blonde (Dawn Rena Lang), a priest (Archie Williams), a pair of illicit lovers (Renaud Haymon and Carla Stevens), and an elderly delicatessen owner.

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