

Cast, Away!: "Don't Talk to the Actors," at Scott Community College through April 21

Written by Thom White
Monday, 16 April 2012 06:00

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Playwright Tom Dudzick's *Don't Talk to the Actors* seems a good fit for the actors at Scott Community College. This story of a young playwright's first play to be produced in New York City includes a range of characters to suit many acting styles – from meek and innocent to hammy and bawdy – and director Steve Flanigin's cast elicited many laughs during Thursday night's handling of Dudzick's material.

The joy begins the moment the play starts, when Danielle Coffin's Lucinda Shaw enters the stage to set up the rehearsal room for the show's play-within-a-play. Meticulously arranging the pencils into perfect position, checking that the chairs are an exact width apart, and adjusting the window blinds for optimal lighting, Coffin elicits giggles, without saying a word, throughout the first several minutes. And while her stern, no-nonsense, almost obsessive-compulsive nature gets several snickers, Coffin's curse-riddled, overly dramatic reactions during Lucinda's phone conversations with her boyfriend – which routinely interrupt the rehearsals – earned some of the loudest laughs of the evening. (My personal favorite moment, however, came when Coffin's Lucinda announced, "I'm a woman now – *a real woman!*" while pulling her ponytail-holder out and whipping her hair around.)

Eric Clark's charming playwright Jerry Przepzaniak, meanwhile, is appealing from the moment he holds up a pencil, revealing stunned wonder and humble excitement when first seeing the rehearsal room for his Broadway-bound play. Clark eventually settles into a simple, boy-next-door niceness befitting an upstate New Yorker (though he does get a bit frantic during Jerry's 36-hour marathon of re-writes), and portraying Jerry's live-in girlfriend, Victoria Armas

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matches Clark's charm, blending a meek demeanor and vocalizations, a bright smile, and unabashed veneration for her childhood crush – actor Curt Logan.



And Isaac Scott, who plays Logan, couldn't be more different than Armas. With his big, deep voice and equally large presence, Scott commands attention, frequently flashing a toothy smile and an "aren't-you-in-awe-of-me?" attitude. Yet as rehearsals progress and Logan pleads with Jerry for rewrites to give his character more grit, Scott goes for even deeper smarminess – hitting on Arlene as a way to get to Jerry – and achieves an emotional and *vocal* swagger that manages to match his physical confidence.

It's unfortunate for *Don't Talk to the Actors* performer Sarah Butcher that Dudzick's jokes for her character Beatrice Pomeroy – the washed up, vaudeville-style comedienne who is Logan's other half in Jerry's two-person play – fall a bit flat. (It's also unfortunate that the fine Kameron Cain has little to work with as the play-within-a-play's director.) Butcher seems to be having a ball playing this over-the-top, crass actress who avoids sincerity by cracking quip after quip, but Beatrice's jokes, as written, tend toward the groan-worthy rather than laugh-out-loud funny. Butcher is also tasked with performing a few musical numbers in a play that's otherwise presented realistically, but she gives it a great go anyway, scoring some good laughs out of her mediocre material.



Though minor, there are a few other missteps in Flanigin's production. Armas' character criticizes Lucinda's wardrobe, referencing a thrift store as its likely source, while Armas herself is dressed in a plain blue sweatshirt and jeans – she actually looks "thriftier" than Lucinda. Act II takes place weeks after the events in Act I, and yet the actors are wearing the same clothes. (Thankfully, there is a costume change in the act's *second* scene.) And then there are the sound effects, which proved distracting whenever an actor would storm off-stage right, yet the sound of a slamming door came from off-stage left.

Occasional awkwardness aside, though, the production's pacing, and the cast's handling of the characters, seemed spot on. I had a lot of fun watching Scott Community College's production

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of *Don't Talk to the Actors*, and hope Flanigin considers producing more of Dudzick's plays in the future.

Don't Talk to the Actors runs at Scott Community College's Student Life Center (500 Belmont Road, Bettendorf) April 19 – 21 at 7 p.m., and information is available by e-mailing director Steve Flanigin at sflanigin@eicc.edu.