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By the time the titular character entered the play, I'd resigned myself to having to endure two more hours of few-and-far-between laughs during Friday's performance of *The Nerd*, while also fighting off a sleepiness fostered by the unusually high temperature in the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre. However, appearing in only his third stage role, Jordan L. Smith woke me up and held my attention with his annoyingly nasally delivery of playwright Larry Shue's monologues. The best reason to see

The Nerd

, it turns out, is the nerd himself.

That's not to say that Smith's Rick Steadman – a Vietnam veteran who moves in with the man whose life he saved during the war – is perfect. Smith's portrayal is 100-percent stereotypical, right down to his wardrobe: glasses with tape over the nose-piece, suspenders, and pens poking from the pocket of his button-up-shirt.. (Thankfully, he's not also wearing a bow tie.) Here, Smith looks like a character from a musical about high school students – *Grease's* Eugene or

Bye Birdie's

Harvey Johnson, anyone? – and it could be argued that such a caricature diminishes the play by removing all subtlety. Still, the actor overcomes these obstacles by playing Rick as so amusingly annoying and so awkwardly interesting, and I found it easy to like Rick for the very reasons the other characters in the play don't: there's a certain charm to his overwhelming dorkiness. I hung on his every word, wondering about the outcomes of Rick's tales of childhood, and not knowing where these strange stories would end.

Adorkability: "The Nerd," at the Richmond Hill Barn Theatre through April 22

Written by Thom White
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