

Richmond Hill Barn Theatre Play Is No "Plastic" Production: "The Man with the Plastic Sandwich"

Written by Paula Jolly

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It's impossible to guess the content of Roger Karshner's *The Man with the Plastic Sandwich* by its title. Is the setting a cooking show? Is the "man" a toy-maker creating plastic food for those miniature ovens lining the aisles of local toy stores? One certainly won't expect the play to be about a man suffering through a midlife crisis brought on by being fired from his job after 20 years of loyal service.

But that's exactly the subject of *The Man with the Plastic Sandwich*, and it's funny and touching, with a story that's relevant to all people who find themselves at a crossroad. There is no better venue in which to present *The Man With The Plastic Sandwich* than the intimate Barn Theatre of the Richmond Hill Players in Geneseo. This is a theatre in the round, and though there isn't any interaction between actor and audience, you can't help but feel that you're part of the story.

A bench in a park somewhere in Los Angeles has become Walter Price's haven. For six months we has stopped here to have a sandwich and coffee after fruitless mornings of job hunting. He's depressed and frustrated and at a loss what to do with his life. Three uniquely different characters invade Walter's life at the park, and though he tries to push them away, he is unable to ignore their presence or the perspectives on life they bring with them. Ultimately, Walter incorporates their lessons into his own life, giving him the courage to pursue a lifelong dream. Stan Weimer gives the character of Walter a wonderful blend of all the emotions a person must have when life has been turned upside down, and the close proximity of the audience allows us to see those emotions play across Weimer's face as he meets and deals with the visitors to his park bench.

Angela Rathman plays Ellie, the first intruder. Rathman brings a bubbly, carefree aura to Ellie as she cajoles and teases Walter into conversation. Unable to resist a cause, Ellie fights to give Walter something she has an abundance of: self-confidence.

Walter will need that confidence when next he meets Haley Fisk, a former executive who has

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given up money and comfort and ulcers to wander the country as the spirit moves him. David Rash is a commanding force as Fisk, bringing a brash assuredness to Haley that is a great contrast to Walter's timidity. It's important to believe that Haley's choice to give up his wealth was a deliberate one, and Rash's fine performance makes that possible.

Accepting a person's career choice is difficult for Walter when Lenore crosses his path, and Jeannie Duyck's portrayal of the "working girl" is bright and sophisticated. Though Walter might not agree with Lenore's choice to work at the world's oldest profession, Duyck's sensitive characterization makes Lenore's choice one that Walter eventually understands.

Blending the subtle story woven throughout *The Man with the Plastic Sandwich* with its humor is admirably done by director, Sharon Luikart. One of the difficulties of working in a theatre in the round is the fact that an actor will always have his back to some part of the audience. Luikart's efforts to minimize that drawback while keeping the actors' movements natural were welcomed.

The Man with the Plastic Sandwich is a wonderful show and worth the trip to the Barn Theatre in Geneseo. Performances continue September 7, 8, 9, and 10.