

Lyrical 'Pavilion' Gets Area Community Theater Premiere at Lee Center
Theater Review
By Brad Hathaway
February 18, 2004

Port City Playhouse has taken on the challenge of presenting the area community theater premiere of a play that has already earned a strong following among local theater-goers.

Craig Wright's "The Pavilion" is, in the words of one of the major characters, "a play about time," and Wright himself has explained that it is about the one-way nature of time in that you can never undo the past or unmake a mistake.

Set in the fictional small town of Pine City, Minn., the play details the events the night the high school class of 1985 held its 20-year reunion on the dock of the Pavilion down by the lake. Peter and Kari had been voted the best looking couple in the class, but their lives hadn't followed the path many of their classmates predicted for them. Peter fled for college and Kari settled for a job handling safety deposit boxes at the bank. Marriage followed, but not to each other. Now Peter is divorced while Kari is married unhappily to the golf pro at the local country club.

Such fare seems pretty run of the mill, but in Wright's hands, it is no such thing. He surrounds the central couple with a host of interesting secondary characters and then has all of them played by one actor who must step into each character for a brief time. He's a classmate, then the chief of police, then a land developer who wants to tear down the Pavilion. Frequently he's the grown friends of both Peter and Kari.

Chuck Dluhy handles all these roles and more, for Wright wrote an over-all character for the performer handling the multiple small roles. He called it the "Narrator" and it is that narrator who explains such concepts as time, eternity and the nature of nature. Dluhy takes every advantage of the opportunities presented by the 16 small roles, giving a striking set of performances, but his portrayal of the narrator himself hits a strangely dark tone that seems at odds with some of Wright's more poetic and thoughtful observations about the nature of human existence.

ANDREW S. GREENLEAF and Barbara Raffaele are extremely well matched as Peter and Kari. The physical attraction they shared in their teens is still strong and Raffaele is particularly good at letting her temptation show as Greenleaf argues for another chance. Somehow, they make it believable that a man who hasn't seen a woman for two decades could, in one night, go from "its nice to see you again" to "please leave your husband and marry me" and have her seriously tempted.

Each is also quite good at playing opposite the many parts Dluhy brings to life in such rapid succession. It can't be easy to keep your focus when the person you're playing opposite switches from a flighty girlfriend to a stoned pot dealer by simply turning around and adopting a separate posture. But it is important that they do so, for it is the believability of their reactions that make Dluhy's transitions work so well.

The script of "The Pavilion" only requires two benches for a set but different productions around the country have played it on a wide variety of structures from highly realistic docks to very illusionary settings. Port City adopts something in the middle ground for the stage of the Nannie J. Lee Center. Two substantial wings of the Pavilion are visible on stage right and left but there is a circular dock area flanked by signs with time-related symbols and the forestage is covered with mirrors that could be the surface of the lake.



Courtesy photo by Doug Olmstead
Scene from 'The Pavilion'
by the Port City
Playhouse.



It is the text of the play and not the set that is most important and here, under Chuck Whalen's solid direction, the production comes through. Wright wrote a very lyrical play with observations worth pondering. Port City lays it all out in a very satisfying community theater production.