

# Defer belief in all but comedy to enjoy 'The Drowsy Chaperone'

When you go to see "The Drowsy Chaperone"—and you must go—you have to enter the Crighton Theatre with all belief suspended.

This Stage Right of Texas production will draw you in, and you'll become a willing participant in the inane, ridiculous, zany, but always entertaining romp.

Many of the lines are so clever that the wit catches you off guard, making it all funnier than you could expect. Oh, I almost forgot: It's a musical too.

Music director Caleb Ackerman from Kindermusik of The Woodlands points out that the show is done to music specifically recorded for it by MT Pit, LLC. This arrangement means that Caleb can join the backstage chorus.

"For the recording they used marimba, piano, timpani, synthesizer, and the usual instruments," he said. "Kindermusik supplied those used in some stage scenes. The cast is confined to perform in exact duration to the music. With no live bail out to cover production blunders, the timing is especially difficult." And in my observation, no blunders reared their ugly heads.

Lead actor Michael Hayes as Man in Chair has never been more on top of his game than here, and a couple dozen others match the outrageous commotion, as the plot travels back in time to the 1920s.

Choreography is exceptional and the music catchy even if you don't go out the door humming a single tune. So much of it all is how it's done, and this concoction is perfectly carved under the artistry of director Travis Bryant.

Hayes sits in an overstuffed chair in his modern-day apartment playing an old 33 1/3 RPM record



**PEGGIE MILLER**

Performing Arts Columnist

and reminiscing about his favorite musical from the Flapper era. Suddenly it all comes to life right there, with flowing set shifts that become part of the show and waste nary a moment.

A key piece of the set is a Murphy style bed lifted in and out of the wall as needed — more than once. Wily craftsman Dennis O'Connor constructed this work in a day, using materials from Home Depot. You don't need to know this, but Kevin Hassell supplies the manpower to lift and lower that bed so smoothly into place. Keep a close eye on the built-in bookcases because they actually are sliding frames that serve multi-scenic purposes.

Denise DeBold merits kudos for props and set decoration, that include painting the huge airplane that comes on stage near the end, complete with cot-

tony clouds that add another humorous touch. You'd be amazed at how she did all this, but I won't spoil any secrets. I also won't divulge the opening of Act II except to advise that you arrive at your seat very promptly after intermission.

Katie Kelly and Reena De Santo created the costumes, adding trim to the vintage dress that Carolyn Wong wears. Katie embellished it from the SR costume room, Carolyn said, and works daily to keep it together for the show as the material is rather fragile.

What the costumers did not fashion in SR's costume room they borrowed from Magnolia West High School where Kim Bryant is Director of Theatre. These include some outfits that Libby Bryant, energetic young female lead, wears.

In fact, most of the Bryant family handle major elements of this show. Kim Bryant is hilarious in the title role. Not only is she drowsy, but her condition intensifies through the constant martini glass in her hand, all exploited with uproarious mannerisms, lines, fringes, and the obligatory headband with feather. The bright choreography dis-

plays sure-footed guidance from Hilary Bryant, acting and directing graduate of Sam Houston State University. We'll have more please.

No SR comedy could ever be its best without the antics of Carolyn and Steven Wong. Their characters complete this one as well. Suffice it to say that they spew into each other's face, but it ends well with a marriage in the finale. Not the marriage you expect, but a marriage just the same.

Jonathan Rozas, a comic I've not seen before, plays a Spanish lothario to the hilt with perfect costuming, timing, and self serving deception. He'll catch you guffawing off guard.

You also may wonder how long it took Phillip

Skoblick and Bobby Mauro to reach such perfect synchronization in their scenes as gangsters on the lam disguised as would-be chefs.

As for dancing, a tap duet between Robert Evans as erstwhile groom, and his best man Hunter McMahon, impress in Act I. There's lots more notable hoofing throughout the show, as well as singing.

Perhaps the loveliest voice belongs to Christina J. Taylor, this show's aviatrix whose vocals have streamed across Conroe's Crighton Theatre many times. Her vast training and experience in opera as well as musical comedy is manifest. But don't count anybody out in this ensemble cast—you can't if you try, and you won't want to.

Travis Bryant said that

technically this is the most difficult show he's ever worked on; an impediment that's visibly conquered, even to the theatrically untrained.

To enjoy this comedic romp that won five Broadway Tonys in 2006, you must prepare to suspend everything rational and sane, and allot yourself a couple hours for pure escapism. That done, you'll reap an unforgettable evening of total distraction.

"The Drowsy Chaperone" plays at 8 p.m. weekends through March 3. There's a matinee at 2 p.m. this Sunday and on March 3. Reserve for \$20 or less at (936) 441-7469 from 3 to 6 p.m. weekdays; until 8 p.m. on show dates, or at [www.stage-right.org](http://www.stage-right.org).

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