

Easter Bunny arrives early in Stage Right's 'Harvey'

Leave it to Stage Right Productions to come up with an idea as clever as an Easter weekend opening of Mary Chase's classic comedy, "HARVEY," with its title character being — you guessed it — a rabbit. While this elusive bunny never utters a word, he comes very close to stealing the show at Conroe's elegant Crighton Theatre.

With a respectful nod to the classic black and white motion picture of the same name (it starred Jimmy Stewart), director Sam Martinez and set designer, Debra Schultz came up with an attractive and creative set concept that is black and white as well.

Even the costumes (designer, Kathleen Zaritski) follow that b&w format. As the show opens the time is 1944, we hear the gentle tinkle of a Scott Joplin rag in the background, and the split-stage design depicts on the left the attractive library in the old Dowd family mansion. It is the residence of one considerably eccentric (or is he crazy?), Elwood P. Dowd, played in a subtly low-key performance by Gerald Livingston. On the right of the stage the secondary scene is the reception room of Chumley's Rest, a



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sanatorium that specializes in dealing with the mentally disturbed.

We first meet Elwood's somewhat frantic sister, Veta Louise (Maria O. Sirgo) and her flighty daughter, Myrtle Mae (Meredith Zaritski). They live with Elwood, and today they are entertaining friends at what they hope will be an elegant meeting of the Wednesday Forum. They are somewhat hysterical for fear that eccentric Elwood will arrive home before their guests depart. Elwood, you see, insists on introducing everyone he meets to his 6'3 1/2" rabbit companion named Harvey. Mr. Livingston gives us a deliciously oblivious Elwood who seems endlessly unaware of everyone's concern about his claim of having a giant rabbit as a best friend. Remarks Elwood, "I've wrestled with reality for over 40 years and I'm glad to say I've finally won out



Photo courtesy Stage Right Productions

Stage Right Productions is currently staging "Harvey" at the Crighton Theatre. The show continues through May 8.

STAGE RIGHT'S "HARVEY"

"Harvey" will continue through May 8 at the Crighton Theatre, 234 N. Main St. in Conroe. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for seniors, and \$12 for youngsters. For tickets & information call 936-441-SHOW, or visit the website at www.stage-right.org.

over it."

It is often said that comedy is that most difficult of tasks for actors, and I think during Act One that difficulty with timing and delivery kept the comedy from fully catching

fire. But the hilarious Act Two was another story. As events unfold, Veta determines that she must have Elwood committed to the Chumley's Rest sanatorium, and she visits there to make the arrangements with Dr. Sanderson (Mike Anderson), and the facility's director, Dr. Chumley (Willard "Will" Radcliffe). In the ensuing mayhem a mix-up occurs as Veta's description of the six-foot rabbit ends up getting her institutionalized instead of Elwood. Prepare for big-time belly laughs

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when she finally escapes the asylum. And speaking of laughs, Radcliffe supplies plenty of them as Dr. Chumley begins to wonder if perhaps he is losing his mind and Elwood is really the sane one. Is there really a giant rabbit? Audience members

will have to watch very closely to get the answer to that question.

In addition to those already mentioned, the capable cast includes Renée Cannon in dual roles as both the maid, and Dr. Chumley's wife, Betty. Cindy Tippens gives us a prim and haughty Aunt Ethel, Megan Nix is Nurse Kelly, Travis Bryant

plays medical assistant, Duane Wilson, Stephen Murphree is Judge Gaffney, and Steve Dowell is the insightful cab driver.

Perhaps my only real disappointment was that Harvey apparently had another commitment (no pun intended) and was unable to remain for the curtain calls. But one theater staff mem-

ber expressed the hope that Harvey may take his bow at future performances. Perhaps you'll get a lucky glimpse if you attend.

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Bentley's columns have appeared in newspapers from the East Coast to the Gulf Coast and may be viewed online at the website: www.ThePeoplesCritic.com E-mail may be directed to ThePeoplesCritic@earthlink.net.