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Arts & Entertainment

Cranford Dramatic Club's Musical *Nine to Five* Strikes a Happy Chord

By **SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY**
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

CRANFORD – We all need some escapism from time to time and Cranford Dramatic Club's latest offering that opened last Friday night is just what the doctor ordered as a spring tonic. *9 to 5: The Musical*, with music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and book by Patricia Resnick, is based on the 1980 hit movie. Set in the late 1970s, this madcap story of new found friendship and revenge is a comic show with a country, homey feel.

Pushed to the boiling point, three female coworkers are fed up with their egotistical, sexist, bigoted boss. Violet, who was played by Lily Tomlin in the film version, is played by CDC veteran Melissa Timpson. Judy, who was played by Jane Fonda, is now played by Kara Wilson, and Hannah Schroeder takes the Dolly Parton role of Doralee. They give their boss, Mr. Hart, originally played by Dabney Coleman now portrayed by Richard Colonna, his due through revenge fantasies and then actually wind up kidnapping him. Their makeshift plan doesn't work out exactly the way they hoped, but the ever-adaptive trio makes it work.

There's a bit of cheesy humor at times, but we buy it because we recognize a despicable boss when we see him. And there's something delightfully satisfying about giving a person a taste of his own medicine. Hart's an insufferable prig whose condescension towards his female office staff

and specifically against Violet is too much to take. He's the jerk who spreads lies that he's sleeping with his well-endowed secretary Doralee. Of course, in today's world, that sexual harassment wouldn't be endured without a trip or two to Human Resources to file a complaint.

Along this farcical journey with caricatures who are straight from decades ago, there is social commen-



The Cast of *9 to 5*

tary. Equal pay for women, merit promotions, job sharing and day care are part of the reforms that the three gals want from their company. And when Mr. Hart is unwillingly "detained" from his job for a month, the gals revamp the company with compassion and empathy for those issues.

Each of the three stars of the show has her moments to shine. Ms. Timpson's strong presence in Violet's song "One of the Boys." Ms. Schroeder has fun in "Backwoods Barbie" and Judy's independence declaration is rendered thrillingly in Ms. Wilson's "Get Out and Stay Out." (Remember this time is ripe with women's liberation indignation.)

A couple of other scene stealing

characters include Roz, (Arlene Britt) as an adorably love struck old maid (sporting great costumes by Dan Schulz), Mr. Colonna in "Here for You" proudly displaying lecherous innuendos and Jason Cilento as Joe in the sweet "Let Love Grow" duet with the versatile Ms. Timpson.

The seven-piece orchestra, brilliantly conducted by keyboardist Thomas Rodgers, is located onstage, out of sight. Even though they are unseen, the wonderful, strong beat is felt throughout the small auditorium. On opening night, the microphones of the lead girls, though, were set too high and their higher tones came off as shrill and screechy. By Act II, a better balance seemed to have been struck.

The Cranford Dramatic Club's unique stage that houses two side thrusts are smartly decorated (by Christopher Abbott) as Franklin Hart's office and Violet's homely apartment.

The team of producer Alan Van Antwerp, director/co-musical director Clifford Parrish and co-musical director Tom Rodgers has assembled a noteworthy cast for this show. Everyone on stage has a ball and so does the audience. As the longest continuously producing community theatre in the State of New Jersey, Cranford Dramatic Club's know for making smart choices. Their choice of this musical is one that leaves the audience humming the title song all the way home.

The production runs Saturdays, May 13 and 20 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, May 14 at 2 p.m.

There's Something Crazy at Community Players' Show

By **SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY**
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD – One of 20th century fiction's most memorable "psychopaths" was hauled into an insane asylum last week in the Westfield Community Players' production of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Dale Wasserman. And although this main character is a brash, egotistical guy who is repeatedly arrested for being drunk and disorderly, we can't help but root for him.

When Randle Patrick McMurphy (Sean Eugene Lough) is arrested, he opts to act "crazy" to avoid being sent to the work farm. Unfortunately, he's put into a mental asylum at a time when electro-shock therapy and lobotomies were something that some of the medical world accepted as necessary to control behavior. That's a bit of foreshadowing and spoiler alert all in one.

McMurphy, whose initials are RPM (think revolutions per minute) enters this world of a mental hospital like a tornado. Because he is a loud-mouthed agitator, he revs up the patients in a drug-induced docile environment; he spreads rebellion and critical thinking amid hijinks. He wins over the inmates as well as Doctor Spivey (Peter Curley)

with his frankness, humor and braggadocio, but not the infamous Nurse Ratched (Faith Dowgin), an ice queen. The nurse's personality is suggestive of a ratchet wrench that goes only in one direction. She's not cajoled or impressed by McMurphy's "charming" antics.

Basically, the show is a power struggle between the rule breaker and the rule maker, with the patients see-sawing between rebellion and submission. When McMurphy asks the patients why they put up with the nurse's verbal abuse, he learns that they basically have been brain-washed into compliance.

Director Ken Webb has assembled a team of accomplished actors who successfully create a microcosm. It's a fascinating conglomeration of personalities that sometimes feed off each other's neuroses. The line-up includes the frail Billy Bibbit (Adam Ziering), a sensitive stutterer who is afraid Miss Ratched will tell his mother about anything and everything he does. Like a little bunny rabbit, Billy is diminutive in nature. Mr. Ziering gives an unforgettable performance as Billy, with the character's stuttering that seems to come, incredibly, from his toes and resonates through his entire body.

The smartest of the inmates is Dale

Harding, played by David Goldstein, who stands up to McMurphy by telling him how great Ratched is. But by the time he is finished championing her, he dissolves into a tearful mess when he recognizes that the men are being pitted against one another by her.

Chief Bromden (Paul Arfanis) serves as the narrator with an interior monologue to his father. Throughout the two acts, with the help of special lighting by Ed Whitman, he talks to his unseen father about the machinery of the world that dehumanizes the population. Mr. Arfanis is perfectly cast as the chief who feels he is small and weak although in size and stature he dwarfs everyone around him.

Joe Leo's characterization of Cheswick is fascinating. The playwright's notes speak of Cheswick's "fluttering hands" and Mr. Leo has realized the fragility of his character through his hands, his hunched shoulders and his scrunched face.

All the actors have developed believable idiosyncrasies for their characters like pulling on an ear, jiggling a leg, rocking in a stationary chair or fumbling with their hands. That's a nod to their individual talent as well as good direction so that it's not overdone to the point of distraction.

Nurse Ratched's creamy voice and countenance belie her true intent. Ms. Dowgin doesn't make the character quite as evil or scary as some others who have played the role, but in the end, this nurse gets what she wants.

The play's success, like the movie starring Jack Nicholson, hinges on the strength of McMurphy. Mr. Lough is certainly up for the challenge of this iconic role and makes it his own. McMurphy has his loyal followers on the ward and by the end, we all become his staunch supporters as well.

For tickets, times and more information, call (908) 232-1221.



GROUP COUNSELING...In Westfield Community Players' production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Nurse Ratched (Faith Dowgin) warns patient Randle P. McMurphy (Sean Eugene Lough), far right, about the consequences of his leading the men in rebellion at the mental hospital. The play, that encompasses both tragedy and hilarity, continues weekends through May 21.

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