

ART OF MURDER

By Joe DiPietro

Generic Theater

August 22-September 14, 2008

For tickets call:757-441-2160

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The Generic Theater has opened its 28th season in its new home with an Edgar Award Winner for Best Mystery Play.

ART OF MURDER is a comedy drama with hints of satire about the world of art and its marketing ploys and outrageous agents and dealers. Are artists great on their own merit or are they created and marketed to fame like a laundry detergent is a subtheme of this imperfect murder mystery?

It's mainly about Jack Brooks who is a painter of some recognition. The problem is he has hit brush block and has not turned out a painting of merit for sometime. Murder comes into play because the artist and his wife Annie and his dealer feel he would earn higher prices and achieve true fame if he were dead. Bullets don't always go where they are aimed and drownings don't always happen as planned either. I won't go into the drowning part of the story or much more of anything else because in this kind of writing suspense and surprise are primary ingredients of the works theatrical value.

Director Matthew Friedman keeps the pot boiling with ever increasing tension. He does about all that can be done with a cast that has its ups and downs. On the upside, is Laura Murphy who plays Annie, the wife, She makes clear the sensitivity, both real and synthetic, and the cunning duplicity of this many faceted woman who is a painter in her own right and at present is more productive than her husband. She performs neatly and with pleasing ease and clarity.

Husband/artist played by Tony Robinson is egotistical, manipulative, arrogant and prone to fits of anger and violence along with betrayal of his wedding vows among other not exactly virtuous characteristics. He's just not a very likeable person. I would like to see though, some chinks in his armor, to see a wee bit of his operative "charm", He does maintain an inner reality that holds our interest for the most part and hits notes of frightening psychopathic behavior.

Joel King is unfortunate casting in the role of Vincent Cummings, Jack Brook's art dealer, who is a flamboyant gay man. He fails to find the character's humor and basic reality as a person who is seemingly good at what he does. Cummings resorts to screaming, contortion, posturing and vocal distortions. Such behavior only leads to dead end roads for actors. He lacks a light comedic touch that the role demands. One thinks of Nathan Lane, Clifton Webb or the late Charles Nelson Reilly. One also wishes that Director Friedman had given him guidance and assistance.

Destiny Kish is pert and effective as an Irish house keeper with a degree in chemistry that she ultimately puts to use. This work by Joe DiPietro lacks the tautness plays of this genre require. It kept reminding me of others I'd seen. I remember especially Ira Levin's "Deathtrap" which ran for five years on Broadway. It was flawless and every word meant something. Not so in this case.

Jason Marten has come up with an atmospheric set that provides a wide variety of playing space and he has created richly textured lighting as well.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.