

On stage

‘Play On!’: Patuxent’s disastrously funny hit

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In the worst production I have seen since I began this gig, the Patuxent Playhouse performers wreak absolute havoc on stage ... oh, wait, they’re supposed to wreak that much havoc.

“Play On!” after all, is a show about a disastrous show, the players in which are pure ham and the playwright a prima donna.

Let me begin at the beginning.

Director Geraldine “Gerry” Dunbar, played by Sarah Stevens, is doing her best to work amicably with the actors she has cast in this original mystery, “Murder Most Foul.”

No, it’s not the Great One’s “Murder Most Foul.”

As Saul Watson, who is the sinister – maybe – Dr. Rex Forbes, played by the real Keith Mervine, explains, there are not enough words to go around to name everything that gets written so Agatha Christie is not being plagiarized just because their playwright has used the same title.

Which is about the only thing she hasn’t changed since she offered her play – royalty-free – to the hapless troupe.

Phyllis Montague, played by Michelle Christine, has a voice that could cut through steel. Or at least the nerves of everyone involved in this production.

The sound of her cheery “yoo-hoos” sends the entire company into spasms because it means she has at least three more pages of changes to the script.

A script that barely resembles the original.

When she appears with a 10-page change three days before opening night, even the ever-patient Gerry puts her foot down.

The changes, the director says, completely alter everyone’s motivation for what they have done.

It doesn’t help Phyllis’ case that she has eliminated lines from her friend Polly Benish’s fat role.

Polly, played by Karen Mattingly, is Lady Dudley, wife of the elegant Lord

Dudley, otherwise known as Henry Benish and played by Randy Geck.

They are husband and wife actors in the troupe and it also does not help when the latest changes have Dudley canoodling with Doris the Maid, played by the lovely teenager Marla “Smitty” Smith, who in real life is Chelsea Lidh.

Throw in the millionaire Stephen Sellers, portrayed by Billy Carewe who is really Jack Reynolds, the lovely Diana Lassiter, fiancée of the menacing medic, depicted by the actress Violet Imbry who is in actuality Joanne Kenlon, and it doesn’t take the first scene for everyone, including the players, to become hopelessly confused.

And then there’s Louise Peary, the stagehand, played by Beyonca Clark. When she is not being yelled at for working on the set during rehearsal, she is doing the yelling because she’s only one person, she’s dropped the coffee pot or someone has fiddled with her equipment.

Finally there’s Aggie Manville,

played by Stacy Oosterink, whose only goal in life is to get the players to remember their lines, hit their marks, not insult one another, not storm off the set, not lose the props and not lose her mind.

Yeh, good luck with that.

And good luck with not missing any lines. No, it won’t be because you can’t hear the actors.

It’ll be because you’ll be rolling on the floor laughing, your neighbors will be cackling and the whole audience will be in hysterics.

After watching the Monday night dress rehearsal, there are now two reasons why I have not yet decided to try my hand at directing: I’m not ready to give up acting and I’m not ready to take Gerry’s job!

It takes a lot of talent for performers to be bad on purpose. Thank goodness they don’t really act like the actors they’re acting ... as ... actors

Rated PG-TNRFBBGIAAFOBLGFFE: The Not-Ready-For-Broadway Bunch Gives Its Audiences A Feast Of Belly Laughs. Great Fun For Everyone.