

Hilarious production of Laughter on the 23rd Floor

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It's doubtful that people realize what it takes for writers to produce the content for that newspaper you like to read or that weekly television show you like to watch.

In a nutshell, it takes a massive amount of work and a dedicated small army where typically, in the end, only a few get the credit and public admiration. But the writers who truly care about their craft are more concerned with their work being up to par than the need for accolades, and they can be their own worst critics.

This self-deprecating nature often comes with some neuroticism and a pinch of crazy, which best describes the characters in East Side Players' first show of the season, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, by Neil Simon.

In a word, this show is exhausting, but in the best way. It's a fast-paced comedy, with witty one-liners and an ensemble cast that owns comedic timing.

It's a show for all, but men will especially enjoy this play, where the characters are mostly male and machismo is high.

Based on the playwright's own experiences as a writer for Sid Caesar's *Show of Shows*, a weekly variety television show in the 1950s, this play is set in 1953 New York City. The entire play takes place in the writer's room where the writers of *The Max Prince Show*, a popular weekly variety show of its day, meet daily to pen the sketches.

They are all out to lunch except the newest member of the team and our narrator, Lucas (Matt Domville), who is intimidated by these lunatic veterans. Milt (Robert Ouellette), the first of the veteran writers to arrive, is an eccentric dresser with the flamboyant personality to match.

He immediately sets in on Val (David Barber) making fun of his Russian descent and accent. There is an entire 15 minutes dedicated to the fact that he can't pronounce a popular expletive. It's a funny, running joke throughout the show.

Next we meet Brian (Daryn Thompson), who has dreams of having a script produced in Hollywood, Kenny (Chris Irving) the boy genius, and the lone woman amongst them, Carol (Valerie Abels), who is as tough and crazy as any man in there.

But no one is crazier or more neurotic than the show's star, Max Prince (Daryl Marks) - well maybe Ira (Daryn DeWalt), the hypochondriac who constantly shows up late because of his ailment of the day which included a suspected heart attack and brain tumour.

Max is beyond stressed out. Not only do he and his team face the constant pressure of trying to produce funny and relevant material, but he's also fighting the network that is trying to cut the budget and change the show to adapt to the political and social climate of the day.

This pressure-cooker atmosphere lends to some outrageous scenes of physical comedy.

By the second act, the audience realizes these change means the beginning of the end for these writers and the show they love. However, watching their creative process conjures up endless laughs and results in one of the most unique plays you will ever watch.

There were several noteworthy scenes with each actor individually, and as an ensemble, giving amazing performances. However, this show is not suitable for children, containing adult content and colourful language.

The remaining shows for *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* are Nov. 6 and 7, 11 to 14 at 8 p.m., and a 2 p.m. matinee on Nov. 8, at The Papermill Theatre, Todmorden Mills, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for students. Call 416-425-0917 or visit www.eastsideplayers.ca

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