

ARTS · Theatre October 26th, 2015

By Eric McMillan

## Going over the Falls, laughing all the way

Led by bubbly performance, zany drama goes for sheer entertainment



PHOTO COURTESY DFM SERVICES

ABOVE NIAGARA: Runaway wife Cass (Kearsten Johansson), left, takes a nearly disastrous helicopter flight with pilot (Val Abels) and would-be falls plunger Lois (Nicole Marie McCafferty).

### REVIEW

*Wonder of the World*, David Lindsay-Abaire, directed by Harvey Levkoe, East Side Players, PaperMill Theatre, running to Nov. 7

I spent the intermission for *Wonder of the World* trying to come up with a phrase to describe the performance of



lead actor  
Kearsten  
Johansson. The  
only word that  
came to  
mind for her  
can't-take-your-  
eyes-off stage  
presence



MADE IN THE MIST: Cass gets piloting lessons from Captain Mike (Chris Irving) who falls for her in Wonder of the World.

was “effervescent” – a somewhat pretentious term, I thought, but how else to sum up that bright-eyed, lively, bubbling phenomenon?

Then shortly afterwards in the play, another actor used that exact word to describe Johansson’s character Cass. So I guess her performance was appropriate to the character.

And what a character. Cass is first seen packing a suitcase to leave her boring husband (Tyler Tanner) and experience the world. But this is hardly one of those Alice-Doesn’t-Live-Here heavy dramas of yesteryear. She’s discovered her husband’s one revolting sexual perversion (to be hilariously revealed to us later in the play) and she’s off to Niagara Falls, emulating Marilyn Monroe, planning to cross some of the hundreds of looney items off her to-do list, like wearing velvet, having a sidekick she can call Gabby, and seducing a captain.

She partners up with another fleeing wife, an alcoholic who plans to go over the falls in a barrel (Nicole Marie McCafferty). She also hooks up – briefly – with Captain Mike who ferries tourists under the falls. And she’s shadowed by two inept detectives, a middle-aged couple on their first case after giving up their yarn store in Buffalo (played assuredly by East Side veterans Sheila Russell and Daryn DeWalt).

Eventually they all end up in a room together receiving therapy from a psychologist in a clown costume, played by the also vivacious – and looney – Val Abels, who has three other parts in the play as well.

That's the plot. But not really. It goes off in so many directions, all of them quite funny. The laughter builds so that even when the odd truly tragic event occurs, you can't keep from giggling.

All through I was thinking there seemed to be – there *must* be – some kind of serious statement being made by *Wonder of the World*, which had once played off-Broadway. The director's notes said something about teaching us to appreciate life despite the harsh randomness of the universe.

I don't know. It's hard to get that from such a screwball comedy, at least as performed by the East Side Players. Once again the community theatre troupe has come up with a vastly entertaining evening. A barrel of laughs.

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