

Chester Theater Company  
*The Making of a Great Moment* by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb.

Directed by James Barry. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“Tonight, through acting, we conjure into this room the vast tapestry of risks. . .”*

Two actors, one experienced and older, one innocent and younger, are bicycling America going from place to place to perform the four hour Epic show **“Great Moments in Human Achievement.”** They are the company, The Victoria, Canada Bicycling Theater Company. They have little in common beside their devotion to the profession of acting. Terry Dean, in his 407<sup>th</sup> production and Mona Barnes in her ninth show are truly mismatched. They dislike one another. They don’t trust one another, but on stage they are the company, the team; they do the work, the expose audiences to the history their play espouses. They are theater. They are. And they are troupers...willing to bicycle across the continent in order to perform. They are every actor I’ve ever known and they are trapped in their profession.



Bill Bowers, Esther Williamson; Photo: Andrew Greto

Part of what makes this show so funny, and it is funny even when it is tragic, is the devotion these two actors feel for their work. They are ardent. They are believers even when they doubt the honesty of that devotion, or fail to ingest their electrolytes, or damage their wheels or suffer nature’s assaults. Esther Williamson’s natural elegance makes her Nora funnier than she might be in another actress’s hands. This character’s mania for theatrical honesty delivered by a “funny” actress would probably cause the role to become phony, but Williamson plays it so honestly that it is hard not to laugh uproariously throughout the play’s 97 minutes.

Bill Bowers, on the opposite side of that coin, as Terry Dean is decidedly straight-laced and unprepared for the sort of production he has accepted at that late stage of his career. He rants, he raves, he applies all of his skills creating a man who has no place on a bicycle, no place performing under a single light in a nursing home. Bowers makes Dean’s discomfort as funny as Williamson’s Nora finds it all so very important. They are terrific together, their opposing styles, based on experience, a delight.

The play within the play examines so many historical moments that it seems like it may never end, even though we only see glimpses of the piece. As they battle over performance skills he tells her “Your Einstein is anti-semitic; and she responds to him with “Your Harriet Tubman sounds like Blanche DuBois.”

They present the historical moment when the kiss was invented, two royals in robes they create from their sleeping bags. The two actors manipulate the world’s truths as they see fit and when they invent duct tape it turns out to be the best moment of their lives, saving the day when bicycle disasters abound.



Bill Bowers; Photo: Andrew Greto

Starting off his first season as co-Producing Artistic Director of the company, James Barry has given this play by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb all of the humor he can muster and it pays off in spades. The comic writing works wonderfully and the more dramatic, human moments in the play take on a lighter lustre than the playwright may have intended. Two good actors in the hands of a third as director makes a perfect match for this novel play about theater and actors and the oddness of attraction and the way that human friendships work when necessary. It would seem that special aspect deserves the duct tape of life.



Esther Williamson; Photo: Andrew Greto

It’s hard to believe that you can see a funnier play than this one in the summer of 2023. Chester Town Hall Theater is a small space, so the call for seats may be at a premium. Everyone in town wants the new team of James Barry and his wife Tara Franklin to succeed and to keep Chester Theater Company at the forefront of the region’s finest theaters. That being the case, tickets for this honest comedy could be hard to come by.

+ 06/25/2023 +

**The Making of a Great Moment** plays at Chester Town Hall, 15 Middlefield Road, Chester through July 2. For information and tickets call 413-354-7771.



Bill Bowers, Esther Williamson; Photo: Andrew Andrew Greto.