

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA
Boeing Boeing by Marc Camelotti, translated by Beverley Cross & Francis Evans.
Directed by Julianne Boyd.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“There aren’t too many like Monsieur.”

Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Words uttered all around me in the theater tonight. Words loudly sounded by me also. “Boeing Boeing” has always been one of the funniest plays I’ve ever seen since 1962. This is only my third production (not counting the film) and each and every time it has caught me and impelled me toward hilarity. This very fine production by Barrington Stage Co. has taken me a step further, bringing me to the brink of peeing in my pants from laughing too hard. I think everyone should see it and find out what great professionals can achieve with great material under the guiding hand of a great director.



Mark H. Dold, Debra Jo Rupp, Christopher Innvar; Photo: Daniel Rader

I’ve always said that this is a play about an overworked housekeeper and it still is, *BUT* in this production that becomes shared space with an American visitor in Paris who simply cannot contain himself, so he spills out all over the stage. Debra Jo Rupp plays Berthe, the housekeeper/maid and Mark H. Dold is Robert, the American in Paris. Christopher Innvar plays Bernard, her employer (“she came with the apartment”) and his college pal who lives in Paris. The three of them drive the play’s comedy, each in a different manner. That they have all worked together in the past must make a difference, for their harmonies are absolute perfection.

Bernard has three mistresses, an American named Gloria, an Italian named Gabriella, and a German named Gretchen. All airline Hostesses for TWA, Al Italia and Lufthansa, each one believes she is engaged to Bernard, shares his home and has a name beginning with “G.”



Gisela Chipe



Stephanie Jean Lane
Photos: Daniel Rader



Kate McCluggage

All three women have dynamic personalities and Bernard has managed to keep them apart with no knowledge of the others. He keeps their schedules close by. However, the same day that Robert begins his visit things go wrong and all three women show up for an overnight stay. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the comedy happens because of this awkward timing in Bernard's carefully crafted lifestyle. The rest is pure Mark Dold whose physical comedy is at its absolute best. I've known him to be a good comic actor at times, but here he excels. Verbally funny, physically outrageous, he collapses over luggage, divests himself of dignity over a kiss, loses himself on chairs, couches and doorframes and generally moves without stopping for most of the second act.

Debra Jo Rupp has the verbal humor with an accent that betrays the many people she has worked for in the past. Berthe is overworked, over-careful about the girlfriends and overwhelmed by her own care for details. Whether Rupp is opening a door, putting on a coat or handling a letter she is funny, funny as funny can be. I still think the play is about Berthe and not about her "monsieur" and Rupp makes me believe I'm right. And the ending of the play convinces me.

The three delicious fiances are played by Gisela Chipe (Gloria), Stephanie Jean Lane (Gabriella), and Kate McCluggage (Gretchen). All three are perfection. McCluggage, however, is exceptionally glorious in her role as the German stewardess whose strength is absolute in every way. Bernard has been a lucky man and by the end of the play so is the exhausted Robert.

Director Julianne Boyd has stepped out of the way of her actors and given them room to be as physical as possible and the result is a carefully constructed farce comedy that works from top to bottom. There isn't a moment that can't provoke a laugh. She clearly understands the form as well as she understands her actors. She has matched each one to their moments.

The setting, designed by Kristen Robinson, with its six doors is ideal for a French farce and extremely inviting as well. You feel you could live there. The costumes designed by Sara Jean Tosetti range from ordinary to outrageous (including Dold's). David Lander's lighting



Debra Jo Rupp, Mark H. Dold;
Photo"Daniel Rader

design provides us perfect time and place sensibility. Fabian Bispo's sound design is grand, ranging from normal to outrageous.

There us a quiet moment in the play where Dold and Rupp get to move their funny characters into a serious chat that gives us their honest, human sides, otherwise rarely seen in this play. Rupp's unanticipated warmth and Dold's peculiar humanity make this a highlight moment of calm in the play that rages most of the time. It is a welcome respite that prepares us for what will follow. I loved it.

You might say I loved the whole production. If you figured that out, good for you and hopefully good for this theater. Everyone should let themselves go, see the show (forget it's called a farce - just think comedy) and laugh as much as you can. That's what it's for: laughter, a much needed commodity in this peculiar time we are living in.

+ 07/21/2024 +

Boeing Boeing plays at the Boyd-Quinson Stage on Union Street in Pittsfield, Massachusetts through August 3. For nformation and tickets go to barringtonstageco.org or call 413-236-8888.