

Majestic Theater, West Springfield, MA  
**Shear Madness**, by Paul Pörtner. Directed by Bob Lohrmann.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

On March 12, 2020, after forty years at the Charles Playhouse in Boston, *Shear Madness* closed its record breaking run. It has been declared the longest running play in American history and there are still productions cropping up all over the world. Originally seen in 1978 it has never aged due to its peculiar premise and you can see it now at the Majestic Theater in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Its script is brief and it changes every night because the cast has to improvise as much of it as possible, keeping the references it makes to local politics, business and societal changes. Jokes may go flat some nights and be the height of hilarity at the next performance. What you need to know, part one, is that it is a murder mystery set in a beauty parlor in West Springfield at 4:30 one afternoon. The second thing you need to know is its up to you to solve the crime and provide the police with as many clues as you can catch during the play. Act One leads up to the crime and into the investigation afterward. Act Two brings you close to the murderer and the motive.



Benita Zahn, Elizabeth Pietrangelo, Steven Sands Jack Grigoli;  
Photo: Kait Rankins

The show is a manic, laugh riot that seems relentless and outrageous. There are enough motives for the murder to keep an Agatha Christie film playing for hours, but the show - with an intermission - only plays for about two hours. There are enough options and opinions about the characters to allow for a different ending in successive performances and the cast can play the ending any way the audiences chose.

The cast at the Majestic is very different from the last edition I saw in Sharon last year. Steven Sands plays an extremely gay hair-dresser named Tony Whitcomb who seems, on the surface, to be the perfect choice as

murderer. He is matched by Benita Zahn as Mrs. Shubert, his most wealthy client who also could be the guilty party due to her snobbishness, wealth and extra-marital affairs. Sands is hilarious and Zahn is wonderfully bizarre.

Elizabeth Pietrangelo plays manicurist and stylist Barbara DeMarco as the absolute slut she claims not to be. Pietrangelo is quick with the quips and wealthy with her witty repartee. The policeman assistant Mikey is handsomely played by Michael DeVito. His boss, Nick O'Brien is played by Jeff Haffner in a hate me/love me officious manner that takes a true talent to pull off well. He has it in spades.

Eddie Lawrence, a very suspicious character with a temper and flair for sarcasm, is played by Jack Grigoli. There were times when he was my favorite character in the play but I didn't vote for him to be the murderer. There is a seventh character in the play, never seen but heard a lot playing the piano in her apartment above the salon. She is played anonymously by whomever handles the sound board offstage. Unlike some theaters I attend the sound levels were perfect for this show.

There isn't much to say about the show for it changes every time they perform it. The set has been designed by Daniel D. Rist who also lit the show beautifully. The hilarious costumes are from the creative mind of Dawn McKay. Director Bob Lohrmann has a flair for this sort of ribald



Michael DeVito, Steven Sands, Elizabeth Pietrangelo; Photo: Kait Rankins

comedy and the show profits from his sense of timing and his absolute willingness to give the actors their heads.

If you've never had the Shear Madness experience this is an absolute must see.

+ 09/30/2024 +

**Shear Madness** plays at the Majestic There in West Springfield through October 20/ Call (413) 747-7797 for tickets.



Steven Sands, Jeff Haffner; Photo : Kait Rankins