

Review: 'My Three Angels' a nice way to ease into holiday season



The cast for MCT's 'My Three Angels' are: (back row, from left) Jacob Ellis, Marty Lee Jones, Andy Malcolm, Jackson Wolffe, Peter Gelblum, Matt Clarke; (seated) Mindy Pedlar and Katie Singleton. Kylan Thureockes — Contributed

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Want to get into a “ho ho ho” frame of mind (without a trace of commercialism)? Then check out Mountain Community Theater’s frothy, light-hearted holiday offering “My Three Angels” at the Park Hall in Ben Lomond.

While rarely performed in this area, the Samuel and Bella Spewack comedy opened on Broadway in 1953 where it ran for nearly a year. It was made into a motion picture twice (once starring Humphrey Bogart).

Nowhere are there three more unlikely angels than the trio of prisoners (two with murder convictions) who are given the job of repairing the roof of hapless French Guiana merchant Felix Ducotel (a boyish, convincing Marty Lee Jones) on Christmas Eve 2010.

Impish, playful and artfully conniving describe the happily conjoined Jackson Wolffe as Joseph, Peter Gelblum as Jules and Andrew Malcolm as Alfred (the three “angels”). Wolffe is the impish one, and his gleeful ideas to sabotage the bad guys and win one for the besieged Ducotel family (some of which includes letting loose a poisonous snake named Adolphe and doctoring the books for Felix) are the best parts of this somewhat lumbering production.

That’s not to say that Gelblum and Malcolm don’t have their own charms. Gelblum artfully launches a thinly veiled flirtation with the lovely Mrs. Ducotel (a strong showing of wifely devotion and resignation by Mindy Pedlar). The athletic Malcolm, earnest, handsome and somewhat brooding, has more than a flirtation in mind with the Ducotel daughter, Marie Louise, an unfortunately too artificial and mechanical Katie Singleton. When Singleton manages to drop the theatricality, she shows promise, but it’s not often enough.

Likewise, Michael Stark as Henri Trochard (he plays a mean harmonica offstage) and Jacob Ellis as Paul are a shade too heavy on the melodramatic spectrum, but both have some good moments as well. Sporting a villainous moustache, Stark demands and commands the moment he arrives at the Ducotel household while Ellis seems timid

and milquetoastish at first, torn between following his heavy-handed uncle's orders and showing his love for the fair Marie Louise. That's why it's difficult for the audience to later accept that he's just a carbon copy of Uncle Henri.

At times, the play seems to be going nowhere and, performed in three acts with two intermissions, makes for a long night of theater. While director Robin Aronson tries mightily to juggle the various plots and subplots, there are times when excising a few lines of dialogue might have made the action tighter. Reining in a few of the overly histrionic actors also would help.

But not Wolffe! As Joseph, he's like a little Kewpie Doll prancing into Ducotel's general store (offstage) to wait on a customer. Poor Felix has a hard time selling anything to anyone – and when he does he lets his customers put their purchases on credit. As a result, he is cash poor and his attempt at keeping accounts is futile.

Not so Joseph. He brags that he can sell anything and demonstrates this by making customers decide to buy what's available in the store, not what they want. When a customer wants a size 16 men's shirt, Joseph takes the smaller size into the house for a few seconds, hums a little tune, then strides back into the store as if the shirt in his hands is now a 16. It's actually the same shirt, but the customer buys it as Joseph chortles, "Just a little snug."

Joseph Hultquist and Austin Kottkamp's expansive set of the Docotel living room is warm and inviting, with a French door leading to a garden of greenery, several bedroom doors as well as a front door and with genteel, but worn, furniture. The three musketeer convicts check out the scene below from a sliding panel in the second story.

Nearly every cast member wears appropriate 1910-era clothing, thanks to costumer Alaina Boys, but the demure period gowns worn by Pedlar and Singleton stand out. Still, the prisoners' neutral beige outfits, even with brown scruff marks, look way too neat and clean. (Nothing that a little roll in the dirt wouldn't solve.)

Both director Aronson's sound design and Tim Armstrong's lighting are effective as well.

While this play – and this production – isn't must-see theater, its campy humor and the appealing performances of the three angels seem like a gentle way to ease into the holiday season.