

Classic Sherlock Holmes Tale Told

Last weekend, we drove some 200 miles on Friday night, which culminated in rush hour in Chicagoland. Saturday was go-go-go, but no complaints here since we got to see Jack Hanna's stage show, something I have been waiting over a decade to see! After a (much too) short visit with family, we were on the road again late Saturday night, and traveled the 200+ miles back home again, arriving about 2am. We got up early for church, and with my blurry tired eyes, I carefully went over my lesson plan for my 1st grade Sunday school class since I was anticipating a special guest. I'm happy to report that my class went off without a hitch, so thank God for answering my prayers – after leaving it in God's hands, I was not even nervous about it, which speaks volumes if you know me and my ability to let my nervousness get to me!!

So needless to say, by Sunday night, I was wiped. But I had been asked by some friends to attend the special press night of their stage play, the Sherlock Holmes mystery *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to write a review for our local paper. I happily obliged, especially because seeing the show on this particular night helped our finding-a-babysitter situation. I didn't know how I would like a Sherlock Holmes stage play as I had never found the books entertaining. But I was entertained by the show, so I decided to put my review on my blog since some of my readers won't be able to see it in the paper. Note that each actor brought something unique to the show, but I was unable to include rambling accounts of each individual performance due to spacial limitations. If you are anywhere near Hicksville Ohio this weekend, I hope the following review will make you want to stop by the Huber Opera House to enjoy a great autumn mystery on stage!

From the Bryan Times – Thursday, October 14, 2010:

HICKSVILLE – While the leaves fall outside, an early darkened evening or a chilly autumn afternoon spent taking in a live stage play is especially enjoyable while viewing a chilling mystery.

This weekend, the historic Huber Opera House in Hicksville comes alive with a classic Sherlock Holmes whodunit, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Join the Hicksville Village Players this weekend as Holmes, Watson, and other curious characters guide you through the tale of the hound that haunts the halls of the Baskervilles. Intended for the audience to piece together, the show is a puzzle whose clues are carefully and individually laid out by the intriguing cast of characters.

Sherlock Holmes, the know-it-all yet admirable mystery-solver is extraordinarily portrayed by Bill Murphy. The audience is held captive while Holmes connects clues between puffs of his pipe. Nicely complementing Murphy's natural Holmes as the ever-faithful, always reliable assistant Watson is Travis Heffelfinger of Hicksville. Heffelfinger's Watson is dependable and sharp-witted, and he is observant enough to attain the job of Holmes' eyes and ears while protecting their client, Henry Baskerville. John Robinson of Bryan portrays Henry, a man who is fearful for his safety while he remains inquisitive as he tries to deduce who – or what – might have murdered his uncle. Providing clues and distractions alike for the famed detective are Dr. James Mortimer (Corey Fowler) and Beryl Stapleton (Lindsay Clem).

Once the investigation carries Holmes and the audience away from Baker Street and into the isolated countryside, strange stories are spun of murder, mayhem, thievery, and betrayal. Around the mysterious moor, the secrets begin to spill, and it becomes apparent that the odd collection of characters might not be as they appear. The audience joins Holmes as he tries to figure out if either the peculiar Mr. Stapleton (compellingly played by John Overberg of Montpelier) or the lady-like Laura Lyons (depicted elegantly by Courtney

Widdifield) can be trusted. Can Holmes' client, Henry Baskerville, presume that the keepers of Baskerville Hall, The Barrymores (persuasively illustrated by Jamy Shaffer of Edgerton and Amber Garza of Antwerp) are truthful witnesses? Why, "It's elementary, my dear Watson!"

In the atmosphere of the historic Huber Opera House, the wonderfully directed The Hound of the Baskervilles will transport you back to 19th century London and directly to Baker Street with Sherlock Holmes himself. The curtain opens Friday and Saturday nights, October 15 and 16 at 7:30pm and on Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 2:30pm on October 16 and 17.

I Am Playing The Part Of The Plant

000PS... wrong show... or is it?. Tonight was the read-through for my latest on-stage endeavor. I will say that reading the script with the actors (*sans* one) was an absolute RIOT! *You Have the Right to Remain Dead* is much more than an audience-participatory murder mystery, it almost plays like a melodrama. I believe I alluded to the fact that this is a play-within-a-play with the actors portraying actors on stage as well as the characters within a very Tennessee Williams-esque production. It will be quite a challenge to keep under control as the hilarity ensues throughout. All of the actors are on stage throughout the entire show. Among the colorful cast of characters are the actors within the local community theatre, the director, the teenage backstage manager, and an inept detective who I believe will be very reminiscent of Columbo (rumpled trenchcoat, tattered notepad, and all).

The fun begins when one of the “actors” is murdered. Each of the remaining thespians (on and off stage) and the audience itself is suspect. Everyone has a different motive for doing the poor sap in and it is up to Officer Bainbridge to discover whodunit, how, and why. Nothing is as it seems, the clues pile up at a hilarious rate, until the guilty party is revealed. In order to find out who did what to whom and with what it was done to whom be sure to come to the Huber Theatre October 9-11. A double show on October 10. Judging from the read-through this will be yet another memorably great production but aren't they all memorable...good or bad?

Were We Off To See The Wizard Or To St. Louis?

I'm not entirely sure but after the final curtain fell, I began to wonder. While we were striking the set, the tornado siren sounded not once... not twice... but three times (a lady). We all piled into the catacombs of the Huber and enjoyed pizza, cake, cookies, and other goodies. I'm so glad the warning did not sound until AFTER the show was over. But everything the theatre took in I believe today at least if not part of last night's take was all profit. Good for the joint venture of the Village Players and Huber Opera House. I just cannot express enough how great it was to be involved in this production in the beautiful theatre. There are stories I have heard about the building only a short 20 years ago that would not be appropriate for this blog.

I just find it amazing every time a set is taken down. All the time and hard work that went into the creation of such a beautiful picture and down in less than half that time. This

was even harder because this was ONLY a three day event as opposed to the seven show run of the [WCCT](#). However, no matter the outcome, there is always something memorable to take away from every show... yes, even Grease had a few fantastic things come out of it and anyone who reads my blog KNOWS what that is.

But, once again, thank you to all involved in *Meet Me in St. Louis* to the Village Players and to the Huber Opera House. Hicksville Ohio has a wonderful venue that harkens back to an era long ago. I look forward to auditioning again.

Meet Me In St. Louis

I've certainly heard of the musical *Meet Me In St. Louis*, especially being a fan of the late great Judy Garland, but I had never before seen it until last night. A great friend played the role of Grandpa, and we were delighted to have the opportunity to watch him age some 40 years and to be able to return to the stage.

First, I'll begin with the venue. The play was performed in a historical building in Hicksville, Ohio called the Huber Opera House. As I learned in the director's introduction before the show, the Huber was originally built by a wealthy man who wanted a place to stage-test his plays between Chicago and New York; I'm thinking some time in the late 1800's; not exactly sure on that. I do know that one of their stage curtains was created right around the time *Meet Me in St. Louis* takes place – 1903-04, and the gorgeous curtain depicting angels in a boat was hanging last night in all it's glory. The Huber is simply gorgeous. I especially enjoyed seeing the pictures of it from the 1990's and how far it's come since then. The owner of it

at that time decided to trash the place when he found out he was going to lose it, and trash it he did. The place was an utter disaster; they even went so far as to rip one of the opera balconies from the wall. Apparently downtown Hicksville was not a place you wanted to be after dark at that time (coming from the 'burbs of Chicago, that's particularly amusing to me – I mean, Hicksville Ohio dangerous? Yeah right!), and the city wanted the Huber torn down. Some very dedicated individuals earned a lot of money and worked their butts off to restore it and give us back the beautiful theater it is today – and I was lucky enough to be able to see a show in it.

As for the show itself, I will say that Meet Me in St. Louis will never be one of my favorite musicals. The cast and crew of this particular production did a wonderful job, but I just can't identify with a cast of characters who randomly break into song at the strangest moments and whose greatest conflicts in life include relocating and deciding who to take to the local dance. That being said, I still had a great time. I really enjoyed being transported back in time, and it was both interesting and refreshing to see how much respect children had for their elders back then. My friend Jamy was awesome as Grandpa, and I don't think I'm being biased. He definitely stood out as one of the better singers, and I was even surprised to see that Grandpa Smith is a much better dancer than Morat Notboratnichkov – one of the other characters I've seen Jamy portray on stage. The little girls in the play were simply adorable, and adding to the fun of the evening was bumping into a couple of friends whom we didn't know were going to be there. Overall, a fun evening out away from the kids, and I even learned a thing or two, which I'll share below. Congratulations Jamy on a job well done!

Random Meet Me in St. Louis Trivia

– Ice cream cones and cotton candy were introduced at the 1904 World's Fair which was in St. Louis. I thought it was really

neat that they chose to serve these as intermission refreshments last night at the Huber.

– The 1944 movie Meet Me in St. Louis starred Judy Garland, but at first she refused the role because she was tired of taking childish roles. After a talk with director Vincente Minnelli, she was convinced to take the role of Esther Smith, and it became one of the favorites of her career. Judy and Vincente got married and had a daughter, Liza Minnelli, who went on to become an award winning actress and singer; earning an Oscar, a lifetime achievement Grammy, two Tonys, and an Emmy award throughout her career.

– Two single recordings from the movie Meet Me in St. Louis became hits by Judy Garland before the movie was even released: The Trolley Song and Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

– During the shooting of the large dinner scene (where one of the older sisters receives a long distance call from her beau in New York), Margaret O'Brien caused mischief on the set. She would change the cutlery around and put two napkin rings beside a plate. The prop man would say, "Please, Maggie dear," when he would liked to have shaken her.

Small Town Makes Good

It seems that the county fair just to our south will be getting some national attention. Chris Cuomo, who is the news anchor for ABCs morning program "[Good Morning America](#)," will be making an appearance at the Defiance County fair on Thursday August 21. While there, he will be taping a segment presumably on the Tractor Pulls or maybe it is to report on the sister cities Hicksville, OH and Hicksville, N. Y. But,

here is the full article for your enjoyment.



HICKSVILLE – The ABC News morning news program, “Good Morning America,” and anchor Chris Cuomo will arrive at the Defiance County Fairgrounds on Thursday to tape a news segment to be seen on GMA.

The program segment is expected to feature highlights of the fair, including Cuomo’s participation in an exhibition tractor or truck pull, to be held at the grandstand between 2 and 5 p.m. before the Kids Day bicycle raffle.

A fair board spokesman believed the segment will air next month, and “Good Morning America” officials could not be reached for confirmation.

Fair board president Pat Slattery said he believes the show is filming in Hicksville due to the National Tractor Pullers Association. “The pullers like our track,” he says. “We could probably hold a national pull with our track.

“I think it’s great the show is coming here. It may even help to bring in funds faster for our (new) grandstand (construction project).”

As Hicksville is the sister city to Hicksville, N.Y., the fair board looks forward to showing the town to the GMA crew.

“When Mr. Cuomo comes here, he’ll be ... right back in the country,” Slattery said.

While Cuomo is scheduled to be on the grounds only between 2 and 5 p.m., GMA camera crews will be seen throughout the fair, taping Thursday evening’s sanctioned tractor and truck pulls as well as conversations with attendees to be shown during the show.

According to the county fair board office, the National

Tractor Pullers Association set up the opportunity months ago, but the board could not alert the media until everything was confirmed this week.

Those wishing to see the sanctioned truck and tractor pulls may purchase tickets (infield, \$8; grandstand, \$7) from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. daily in the fair board secretary's office.