

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.*

Two Weeks To GO!

Two weeks from tonight will be OPENING NIGHT of the Sherlock Holmes classic (still can't believe how many odd looks I get whenever I mention the title) *The Hound of the Baskervilles* at the splendiferous (yes... that is a word) Huber Opera House!

For my part, I am happy to state that my lines are learned which is quite common at this point in a show (more common than the line learning from my last play... still a great experience but challenging which was even more rewarding personally). The next couple of weeks will be a whirlwind of activity from work to vocal lessons to rehearsal and whatever else may come my way but as always... I AM SUPER EXCITED!

Sunday, my talents will once again be used in set construction. As many of you know if you ever need anything painted... I am your guy! I remember the praise I received for my last set painting... I think it was a few years ago for *The Odd Couple*. Funny how no one has ever asked me to once again use my paint brush. Their loss, I guess. But my talent has

not gone unnoticed. More than once [justj](#) has commented to [Mare](#) about my remarkable painting prowess. We'll see on Sunday if it used.

Hopefully, by Tuesday everyone will be better on their lines to avoid the dreaded Saturday before review rehearsal day. I just learned that another tangenteer will be coming to review the show. Hopefully, it will not take as long for her review to be published as the one I wrote for OKLAHOMA! did.

Click the link to the [Village Players](#) website for tickets and time information.

Tech Sunday

WAIT A MINUTE! Isn't this a week early?! We still have another full week and a few days before curtain. Weell... that may be but the Huber is always in a bind this time of year: school programs, civic gatherings, etc. So, we must share the space with others. Mr. Potter would definitely find this situation downright despicable. But, I guess we will make nice. Yes, we did have the lights and mics going for the first time four our nearly 4 hour rehearsal... which was to be expected. However, it went rather well for the first time on stage, off book, all the way through with lights, sound, and set thrown in. I was pleasantly surprised how well I did with the lines. There was only one spot I really noticed where I forgot a line but the same is repeated only two lines later, so I will just pick it back up Thursday night.

Poor George... I'm not entirely sure that I would like to be in his shoes. All those lines. I have a great many, but.. OH, MY! In one of our scenes together, he asked me why I did not have my script. It was in the house being used for prompting.

I am also happy that I have been able to come up with my full costume... minus a hat... in my own personal wardrobe. I had to take my jacket to be cleaned, but that is to be done by Tuesday afternoon... good to go!

I must say that I think we have another heart-melting, scene-stealing little tyke on our hands. It's a good thing Mr. Potter and Zuzu do not share time on stage because I'm not sure I could keep the mean demeanor.

So... another 12 days before curtain. Just need to keep reading over my lines, getting my cues in order. I did get a new line tonight... added from the movie

Evilness IS Greatness

I believe we are now in our fourth week of rehearsals and still in the modified crampness that is the Huber's costume shop. BUT, we get the stage tomorrow night... **HOORAH!!!!** Tonight, we put everything together... blocking and lines, the whole show start to finish. Not too bad. Travis was very pleased with our efforts. One piece of advice was some of the casts dancing around on stage... which is always difficult the first couple times through... especially when it is a non-musical, non-dancing production. However, this comment did not apply to me for obvious reasons that will be made quite clear when you come see the show the weekends of December 11 & 18..

Personally, I am quite pleased with my evilness so far. I constantly hear references to "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch" and Scrooge... I still think Mr. Potter is even more sinister. I have one line that I just love and cast members have commented on my delivery. However, I need to look at my long

passages. I get on a devilish roll and then blank out on a line, but I **AM OFF BOOK!**

Still needs work but once we get on the stage it will all come to greatness! And the [Village Players](#) NEW website is up and running... so check it out.. Although, I need to point out that on the online ticket ordering, only the first weekend is up.... something which [Webman](#) and I discovered A small glitch I forgot to mention to the director. Oh, Travis....

I almost forgot to mention the lovely drive home in the fine London fog that has only gotten worse as I make my way to watch the hilarious *I Love You, Man*. Good luck with the drive in the morning or the delay whichever comes your way.

Westward, H0!

OK... Mare and I will soon be on our way to the state of ILL in America Country. I have Vera loaded up with directions along with mapquest printed directions, hotel check in sheet, and printed tickets (Justin Case), and cell phone. Mare had to work last night and just called and told me she would be here soon! WHH0 HHH0000!

Last night's audition went well. I listed all the male roles I could think of (the adult ones, anyway). I still think I could pass as one of the Bailey children. I did forget another role, that of Mr. Martini who is an Italian immigrant who has a traveled to America with his a wife. That a could a be fun!

Lots of people came out. LOTS of kids. Squirmy and his daughter came up and he read well. But Jade... OMG... if ever there was a heartwarming, scene stealer... I think it would be

very hard to find a more adorable Zuzu. Results Sunday night. Read-through hopefully next Thursday.

Often Imitated But Never Duplicated

Tonight, following an extra long day at work, I will be heading over to the Huber to audition for a role in the holiday classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. There are so many great roles in the show starting with George Bailey, himself. I'm tempted but 300+ lines sounds a bit daunting to me. I thing Clarence would be fun to play. I love playing an evil villain so Mr. Potter is definitely on my radar. Of course, there is the duo of Bert and Ernie whom I have been looking into and the people behind *Sesame Street* state uncatagorically that it is mere coincidence that the muppet friends are named as such. Of course, I will be pleased to accept any role offered to me. So many great roles in the beloved tale that ironically was a flop when it was released in 1946. So many variations on the theme but has it ever been duplicated?

I Hate Long Waits

WOW! This has to rank amongst the quickest audition results I have ever gotten. Monday morning at 10AM (mere hours after I auditioned), I got a phone call from the assistant director of *You Have the Right to Remain Dead* and was asked if I would like to accept the coveted, intrigal part of Harnell

Chesterton. I'm not sure how much he's involved but from what I read, he has a LOT to say and a hilarious bit. Looks like yet another great role!

Unlike another show I know that has been cast for a month and a half and has less than 8 weeks to curtain, rehearsals for this begin next Monday with a read-through. The costume matron (the same as for *Meet Me in St. Louis*) wants to get started immediately with her excellent ideas. If anyone saw MMiSL, you surely remember the wonderful costumes created/hunted down for that show... including the menagerie of hats worn by Grandpa Prophater. I can't wait to be back onstage in general but to be back on the Huber stage will be a treat!

AHHHH... show dates are October 9-11 with a matinee and evening show on Saturday. So those of you cast in Little Shop have no excuse for not seeing it.

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.
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Ice Cream, Cotton Candy, Lions, And Trolleys

Tonight was opening night for Meet Me in St. Louis (Louis) and it went remarkably well from the stage, anyway. The director presented us each with a carnation and told us that we were the best cast she has ever had (and she has been involved with the theatre since 1974). Prior to the show, she gave a short speech on the historical significance of not only the show but also the Huber theatre itself.

But for anyone who has never had the opportunity to be inside the [Huber](#), you owe it to yourself to visit it. It is really amazing and has a large history to it... some good... some best left forgotten, but all part of history. I vaguely remember when the building was known as Tremors and eventually fell into ill repute until a group went in and cleaned it up. It really is a gorgeous site in which to see a [show](#) and even better, to perform.

During intermission, refreshments were sold. These were also a nice addition to the historical effect. Ice cream cones and cotton candy were both introduced at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The break lasted a bit longer than the typical 15 minutes. The ice cream was still hard and people were standing outside the building to get some. Carol, bless her heart, jumped in to help scoop ice cream.

During curtain call, I watched John Truitt, who stood to my right, to bow. Unfortunately, he was bowing all over the place at the wrong time. Finally, I just watched the center of the line for our mass bow. A wonderful show with a very responsive audience.

Following the performance, I went out to greet the public. Megan actually got me a totally unnecessary gift. Just her

and Carol's presence in the audience was the only present I needed. There were a few other audience members I knew and had to chat with, lots of cool compliments for Grandpa. I even considered going out to McDonalds across the street in full dress and makeup, but decided against it.

This weekend seems to be jam-packed with theatrical productions. We have *Meet Me in St. Louis* at one theatre. *Lion in Winter* at another (hope it went well, [j.](#) *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* being presented at a nearby high school as well as a high school production of *Les Misérables*. Lots of good stuff happening if only I had time to see it all.