



Event - Thursday, March 3, 2005

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'Goodbye Charlie' has something for everyone

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News

Entertainment

[Go to a Concert](#)

[Go to an Event](#)

[Go to an Exhibit](#)

[Go to the Movies](#)

[Go Out on the Town](#)

[Go to the Theater](#)

[Visitors Guide](#)

[Calendar of Events](#)

Communities

Classifieds

Shopping

Cars

Jobs

Customer Service

Reviewers occasionally grouse that the comedy "Goodbye Charlie," written by George Axelrod in 1959, isn't all that funny. That's probably because the play isn't really a comedy in the strictest sense of the word, although it undeniably contains humorous moments.

It's just not wall-to-wall laughs, and shouldn't be.

What "Goodbye Charlie" really is can be found somewhere between dark comedy and light tragedy, and veteran director Betty Hales nails it with her Waynesboro Players production, which opens tonight. Hales has assembled a highly competent cast to interpret a play that requires nuanced character development, and in doing so has come up with an intelligent and enjoyable reading that, essentially, has something for everyone.

The story line centers on Charlie Sorel, a screenwriter for whom wine, women and song are everything -- and not necessarily in that order. Unfortunately for Charlie, he dies at the business end of a husband's pistol when he's caught in bed with the man's wife.

But God obviously has a sense of humor as well as a sense of justice, because Charlie doesn't immediately go his just reward in the hereafter. Instead, he returns to Earth in a woman's body, and spends the rest of the play learning the error of his ways.

A set-up like this presents, of course, opportunities for hilarious situations, opportunities that are fully realized by the Waynesboro Players. But it also allows the actors to explore their characters and plumb depths of the human experience -- freedoms most comedies simply provide.

"We did this play a number of years ago at Oak Grove Theater, and I developed a real affinity for it," said Hales, who at that time was a member of the play's cast. "But I knew that doing it again would open up new avenues for us, and allow us to see perspectives that weren't really explored in the former version.

"The actors," she concluded, "have done just that, and turn out what I believe are fine performances in a funny play with

surprising depth and breadth. There's a whole spectrum of emotions I don't think we hit on in the Oak Grove version, and because of that I believe this play will appeal to a wide range of audiences."

Jenny Howard, one of the area's most talented actresses, gives a strong and memorable performance as Charlie, and Ben Houseknecht appears as his best friend, George. Jennifer Launt portrays Rusty, and the cast also includes Charlie Lawson, Michelle Jenkins and Jerry Pangburn.

"Goodbye Charlie," which runs about two hours including a 15-minute intermission, was produced by Craig Cavanaugh.

If You Go:

- what: "Goodbye Charlie"
- when: 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday
- where: Louis Spilman Auditorium, Waynesboro High School
- more info or tickets: 949-7454

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