

## the Marble

### THE DROWSY CHAPERONE - Max's Review

*The Drowsy Chaperone* is a slippery play to pin down. On one level, it's a hokey 1920s-style musical: the kind of show where the dizzy matriarch turns party planning into a Vaudeville routine, or where one wedding can turn into three. On another level, it's an affectionate parody of those same hokey musicals, where the puns and quips and lyrics have been stretched *just enough* to reach the point of satire. And on a third level, it's an ironically distanced, meta-referential lark that subverts every theatrical trope it can.

The master of ceremonies for this three-ring circus is the enigmatic "Man in Chair," played by Kyle Kushnir. He's a becardiganed theatre buff who claims to be "suffering from a non-specific sadness" but never drops his impish grin. As his favourite musical plays on the turntable and comes to life in the confines of his apartment, Kushnir interrupts and rhapsodizes and giggles at even the lamest jokes. The show wouldn't work if we didn't like the man and look forward to his interjections; luckily, Kushnir more than pulls it off.

The play-within-the-play (also called "The Drowsy Chaperone") is frothy and inconsequential, but of course that's by design. The actors uniformly acquit themselves well, from straighter roles like Alan Penty's butler (named "Underling," naturally) to parts like Alf Small's "Adolpho" (a Lothario costumed like a cross between Bronson Pinchot and a bull-fighting Dracula). The machinations of the plot may not be great drama – or even, really, great farce – but they provide great set-ups for Kushnir's punchlines.

In fact, *The Drowsy Chaperone* is most interesting when it wants nothing to do with "The Drowsy Chaperone." A lot of comic mileage comes from the oddball ways that the framing device upends the "traditional" musical experience, including a hilariously inappropriate act-break mixup and a well-timed interruption of the final crescendo. The play-within-the-play is by the numbers, but an anarchic mind has been doodling in the margins.

Langham Court's production is top-notch, and carries a real go-for-broke energy. I saw it on Saturday, and after a preview, opening night and one regular performance, the cast and crew had their work down to a science. There weren't any missed cues or botched pratfalls, and that became an increasingly impressive feat as the show heaped more and more high-wire gambits onto the ensemble. They meet the challenge, which is considerable (this is the only musical I've seen to feature a round of duelling tap shoes, a blind-folded roller-skate routine and a plane crash), with professionalism, humour and aplomb. Now the fog machine just needs to be dialled back to *maybe* fifty percent.