

Millman and Dwyer: In Our Opinion Norman Doesmen does New York

It is not often that someone has a dream and it becomes reality within six months. This is the case for a handful of people in New Hope.

Off Broadway at the Abingdon Theater, the comedy "Norma Doesmen" is making people laugh this spring, just as it did in New Hope several months earlier.

The current show is being produced by local residents Jim and Kathy Lyons of Lyons Productions.

Stephen Stahl, the writer and director, said he could not wish for better producers.

And the backstory of how they got to the New York stage is inspiring.

Of course, New Hope has had a history as a place where playwrights can test the waters and then move on to take their chances in New York. Now "Norma Doesmen" is the latest script to move on from its beginnings in Bucks County to its latest reincarnation.

The genesis of the current production began with New Hope resident and businessman, Gary Scibelli, who created the title character to do as a 20-minute sketch

for New Hope's gay pride event, "New Hope Celebrates."

The concept was so wonderfully outrageous and Gary's commitment to the role so strong, that we asked him if he would like to do an evening as a benefit for The Bridge Theater Company, a New Hope theater group we are involved in. We told him we would ask our friend Stephen Stahl to write something bigger for Gary to do.

Full disclosure, Gary is our neighbor. He owns a store three doors down from us. We would never have conceived of doing this show but for the tidal wave of enthusiasm that poured off of Gary about what he wanted to do.

Stephen was inspired, writing page after page of hilarious dialogue. He created a two-act bawdy, laugh-a-minute script that he was naturally proud of - it was so obviously funny. The Bridge Company produced the show as a fund-raiser for itself and contributed a portion of the profits to the Bucks County SPCA.

When the Bridge Theatre Company first considered doing the show as a fund-raiser we were fortunate to have a number of vol-



Tommy Femia as Norma Doesmen.

unteers help us. However, two volunteers who came to our aid really stood out. They were Jim and Kathy Lyons who designed the set and provided all of the furnishings for the set.

They opened their home to us so that we could have readings and rehearsals. They even allowed us to have a photo shoot in their home. We can honestly say that without them, it would have been very difficult to put on the production. During the two-night run of the show, Jim controlled house lights and participated in the clos-

ing scene as cop number one. Kathy was back stage both evenings as one of the dressers.

Jim and Kathy have been New Hope residents for many years. In fact, they have also known Stephen Stahl for a number of years. So when Stahl got the word out that he was looking for investors in the show, the Lyons wanted in. Several investors approached Stahl and suddenly it became a bidding war and the Lyons won.

We asked them why they were so adamant about producing the show and Jim said, "We were involved in the New Hope production and really felt that this is a good show that has tremendous potential."

What was remarkable was how the inspiration and dreams of one can inspire the dreams of others. A definition of synergy perhaps would be the result of friends believing in each other, working hard for each other and creating opportunities for each other.

Jim and Kathy travel to Manhattan six days a week to be at the theater for all of the performances.

Prior to the opening of the show, they not only attended all of the rehearsals, but also they put up the actors in their home for nearly three weeks.

Jim worked with the set designer and wound up creating the entire set. Considering that the new theater had a smaller stage, Jim had to redesign the entire set.

Kathy is the company manager. She handles all of the ticket transactions, promotions and advertising while Jim works the concession area and constantly oversees the operation of the theater. They both love their involvement with the show and hope to take it on tour or to a larger venue in Manhattan. If they do, chances are Gary Scibelli will be back on stage reliving his dream as Norma Doesmen.

Scibelli was unable to do the New York show because of prior commitments. Internationally known Judy Garland impersonator Tommy Femia is doing the role in New York.

Abingdon Theatre is at 312 West 36th Street. Tickets can be purchased through Smart Tix 866-527-5376.