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- [Jobs](#)
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- [Classifieds](#)
- [Marketplace](#)
 - [Directories](#)
 - [Hot Deal](#)
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[Entertainment](#)

When crazy isn't funny, it's uproarious

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"Norma Doesmen" in the Red Room at Society Hill Playhouse 507 S. 8th St., Philadelphia Through Nov. 7
Tickets: \$35 Info: 215-923-0210 or www.societyhillplayhouse.org

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By Debbie Merlo

Open the closet and throw Casanova's rule for seduction out the window. Norma Doesmen redefines convention.

A long, tall, crazy woman with red lips, a schizophrenic servant, a narcoleptic and a man on the run from the repo men are the characters in this hilarious parody of "Sunset Boulevard," the 1950s film and Broadway play about Norma Desmond, a faded star of the silent screen.

"Norma Doesmen" stars Garrett Longo as Norma and Ken Shepard as Max.

Benjamin McClung is Joe Dillis, an unemployed script writer who lands in the driveway of the once grand chateau after his car breaks down. Jamie McKittrick plays Betty Shaveher, Dillis' narcoleptic girlfriend.

Within the walls of the run-down fortress lives and lurks the reclusive Norma — insane, over-sexed and waiting for the right opportunity to make a comeback. She is tended to by her servant Max, whose penchant for wearing Norma's clothing — despite her protests — is only overshadowed by his affection and unabashed candor. Max prominently displays himself with pride and confidence as he parades about the house, secretly writing fan mail to Norma when he isn't singing to a feather duster or showing his obvious disdain and jealousy for Norma's latest object of affection.

Alas, schizophrenic and crazy meet Dillis and his girlfriend when chance and misfortune unite and comedy ensues.

The talented cast elicits more rip-roarious laughter than any puritan, poker-face theater-goer could resist.

Produced by MY Productions, "Norma Doesmen" was written and directed by New Hope's noted playwright and director Stephen Stahl, who has production and directorial credits in over 150 stage shows. The role of Norma was commissioned by Garrett Longo.

When Longo first saw "Sunset Boulevard" in London years ago, he immediately fell in love with the tragic, yet beautiful character of Norma Desmond.

He was inspired to create Norma Doesmen and developed the original production, produced by Bridge Theatre Company.

He says they had — at one time — thought about doing Norma as a twenty minute skit. Instead, it became the show and went on to run in New York City, where it was produced by another company. Longo was unable to move with the show to New York and graciously turned the role over to Tommy Femia.

Originally from New York City, Longo moved to New Hope twenty-one years ago. Before he retired from his day job he made a living as an insurance salesman and began female impersonation at age 20. Longo is excited to be back in the role he originated and hopes the show will continue to achieve the success he has envisioned for it. As Norma, "He loves it, lives it and is it!"

Ken Shepard is Norma's original off-Broadway star and returns for the role of Max. His impeccable comedic antics on-stage add continuous hilarity to the entire performance.

Benjamin McClung returns to the Philadelphia theater scene as Joe Dillis. In real life, McClung is thankful to the talent agency for getting him a job and a foot in the door, that Stahl didn't slam it in his face and for a loving girlfriend. As Joe Dillis, the poor lad could only be so lucky.

The talented actress, Jamie McKittrick plays Betty Shaveher, who has a lot going for her provided she can stay awake. McKittrick, a Philadelphia based theater artist, has a degree in theater from Muhlenberg College. She has

many performances to her credit and was nominated for a Kevin Kline Award for best supporting actress in a musical.

“Norma Doesmen” is an adult comedy with music in two acts showing in the Red Room at the Society Hill Playhouse for a limited engagement through Nov. 7. The theater is tucked away on 8th Street in Philadelphia — just a half block from the bustle of the South Street.

Inside the century old building are Victorian pressed-tin walls and ceilings — an inviting atmosphere to enjoy good, entertaining shows. The theater has developed a niche by providing comedies that invite the audience to enjoy, have fun and laugh.

Keeping up with tradition, Society Hill Playhouse proudly presents “Norma Doesmen,” a play where sitting back and enjoying the laughs is simply uproariously irresistible.

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