

Local production sparkles off-Broadway

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From New Hope to Broadway with light-hearted lunacy and love! On March 8, writer/director Stephen Stahl, with the help of Jim and Kathy Lyons of Lyons Productions in New Hope, successfully transformed Stahl's campy, comedic "Norma Doesmen" from the stage of the New Hope Eagle Fire Company to The Abington Theater on W. 36 St. in Manhattan. Many New Hopians were in attendance to cheer him on!

"Norma Doesmen," written by Stahl, is a two-act self-proclaimed "adult comedy with music" loosely based on the classic film and Broadway musical "Sunset Boulevard." It is the story of a faded and forgotten star of silent films, Norma Doesmen, and her quest to be loved and light up the sound stage once again in a concerted comeback by starring in the melodramatic 'talky,' "Salome."

While "Sunset Boulevard" sheds pathos on the main character and her gradual descent into delusion and madness, in Stahl's take the character is more to be censored than pitied. She is portrayed as a raunchy, reckless woman, already over-the-edge, lusting for male affection in any form and desperately craving the limelight, stopping at no cost to get it---literally and figuratively.

Her love interest, playwright Joe Dillis, conceals little of his shifty and snarky shenanigans, carefully but comically conniving Norma's attention and affection by catering to her grandiosity and general lunacy. While Joe's web is successfully woven it ultimately leads to his demise.

Though the plot and the set are all thick, seedy and "other worldly" dark, the light-hearted production is frivolous and frighteningly frank yet funny thanks to Stahl's gifted script, laden with hilarious one-liners. Glittering and glamorously gowned in the lead role is veteran singer-actor-impersonator talented Tommy Femia, best known in New York and the "pink carpet" for his 25 year stint at various variety clubs doing gigs as singer Judy Garland.

Femia is fantastic as he rolls out this ruthless and lecherous character with a lilt in his mannerisms and a twinkle in his eyes, heavy with mascara, constantly reminding the audience that it is about parody and all for fun. Or, as the character Doesmen screeches every chance she gets, "It's all about me, ME, ME!"

Other Broadway veterans in starring roles include Ken Shepard as a cross-dressing Max-the-director-turned-butler for Doesmen, and Christina Giordano as Joe's narcoleptic girlfriend Betty Shaveher. Adding to the kookiness of it all are the singing and dancing talents of the four, as they strut and stroll through intermingled classic songs like "It's In His Kiss" and "Ballin' the Jack." Among the some thirty New Hopians that came to the opening were New Hope Borough Council president, vice-president and council member Sharyn Keiser, Claire Shaw; and Ed Duffy

respectively. Also in attendance was New Hope Shoe's Gary Scibelli, who originated the role of Norma at the opening local production in December, 2009.

"I am delighted to see so many friends up from New Hope to see the new version of the show," said Stahl at the after-party. In the program notes it is written about him, in self-parody similar of the show, "He is thrilled to have the opportunity to present the insanity within his mind through Norma Doesmen."

Subsequent reviews from the Village Voice's Michael Musto, GO Magazine and others cleared the way for a successful run. "Norma Doesmen" continues at the Abington Theater, 312 W. 36th St. in New York, through March 21.