



The Oregonian

Dinner theater: Eat up this act

Friday, January 05, 2007

The Oregonian

Where did local dinner theater go? With the closing of Sylvia's Italian Restaurant & Class Act Dinner Theatre in July 2005, it seemed as though the shows had disappeared from Portland -- but probably not for long.

Portland-area writer and actor Lou Pallotta has reintroduced dinner theater to Portland with "Who Stole My Dead Husband" at Madison's Grill. The musical is a refreshing, witty complement to the thriving theater scene in town.

While the play has a few rough edges, the story and actors stitch themselves seamlessly into the checked tablecloths at the fictional Spumoni Gardens Italian Restaurant, where the audience watches the play unfold around them.

"There is a sentence on the Web site that really describes what growing up in Brooklyn was like," Pallotta said. "More happens to an Italian family in one day than happens to most people in a lifetime, at least that's how I remember it."

Pallotta plays Spumoni's owner, Luigi Fishetti, an Italian who doesn't want his deceased brother-in-law to be embalmed at a funeral parlor that isn't run by "family," so he has his lackey Jimmy (Jim Caputo) pick the body up to take it to an Italian-owned funeral parlor.

"Most of the story is based on things that actually happened in my family," Pallotta said. "I just exaggerated it a little."

The creator of the show plugs it this way: It features "four courses, 12 songs, a million laughs . . . and one dead guy."

The show opened in 2004 under a different name at Portland Meadows. But Pallotta felt that the show could be better, so he moved it to Madison's, found producer Loren Castillo and spent three weeks tearing the play apart and rewriting.

Next, Pallotta hired director Stan Foote, artistic director for Oregon Children's Theatre, to work out story kinks and direct the show, which turned out to be the recipe for dinner theater's triumphant return to Portland.

"Who Stole My Dead Husband," 7 p.m. Saturdays at Madison's Grill, 1109 S.E. Madison St.; 1-800-966-8865, www.whostolemydeadhusband.com.

-- Joshua Sommer

Special to The Oregonian

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