

# “Tenor” a Triumphant Return To Blue Hill’s Town Hall



Written by Cathy Shane

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Jenny Smick, as Maggie, confronts one of the two Otellos in “Lend Me a Tenor.”—PHOTO COURTESY NST

**BLUE HILL** — The audience bucked with laughter on Friday night as the characters in “Lend Me a Tenor” scrambled on stage, slammed doors and flapped limbs.

“Tenor’s” hilariously performed scenes make it the perfect performance to mark the triumphant return of The New Surry Theatre (NST) to the Blue Hill Town Hall. The opening performance of “Tenor” (playing through Aug. 18) had the packed-tight audience squealing with delight as the slapstick comedy unraveled on the small community stage.

Despite the small stage, the players give a huge performance with much credit going to the production crew and director Bill Raiten, who founded the NST and its acting school in 1972.

Written by Ken Ludwig, "Tenor" is set in 1934 at the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. Money-grubbing Saunders (Dennis Harrington), the general manager for the Opera Company, is in a rage as he waits anxiously for Tito Morelli (Herb Mitchell), the world famous tenor scheduled to sing the lead in "Otello," to arrive at his suite. Although, Tito finally does arrive, other mishaps lead him to overdose on his sleeping pills, causing Saunders and his always-on-edge assistant, Max (Julian Chapman), to think him dead when he is only — very deeply — asleep.

As a result, Max is forced to take Tito's place, dressing himself in the outfit and black makeup of Otello. Once Tito awakes, a series of mistaken identities arise, creating chaos and confusion.

The two lead roles are beautifully played by Mitchell and Chapman.

Herb Mitchell, who has had a successful career in theater, film and television (including a recurring role on "The Practice"), plays Tito and is absolutely charming. One of his comedic highlights is the scene where he discovers that his wife, Maria (Cindy Robbins), has left him which causes the big, burly Italian to cry like a little child, only to be soothed by Max's singing.

Chapman has performed in previous NST performances, such as "Lost in Yonkers" and "View from the Bridge." His is an anxious and fretful character. Chapman really captures his personality with gestures — by consistently taking off his glasses, rubbing his eyes and tucking his hair persistently behind his ears. His spastic outbursts — widening eyes and stuttering — had the audience laughing at this character's quirks throughout the entire show.

The female characters, Saunders and the Bellhop (Jim Fisher) are a riot, too. Jenny Smick plays Maggie, Max's love interest. Her face is priceless in the scene where she pulls away from her kiss with Max (who she believes is Tito) to reveal an absolutely love-struck young girl, who is also foolishly covered in the black makeup from the Otello guise. Much admiration goes to Smick and Shari John (Diana), who wear slinky lingerie in the seduction scenes with the two Otellos.

The set design (done by Kenny Weinberg) and construction (done by Frank John) reflect a fancy 1930s suite, consisting of six doors (mainly used for slamming as characters scramble in and out of a scene). One door divides the suite into two rooms, allowing the audience to view what's going on in both rooms while the characters onstage are unaware. Other neat features include mist that floats from behind the bathroom door (indicating steam from a bath) and the projection of fireworks against the wall as the two Otellos are "occupied" by the ladies (note: adult content in this play).

The costume design by Elena Bourakovsky matches the period, where the female characters wear flapper-style dresses and the men, formal tuxedos. Julia (played by June Carter) looks fabulous in a shimmering, silver gown and headband and the matching Otello outfits (including tights) look just as wonderful, while serving their humorous purpose.

There are many other people involved (stage managers, lighting designer, technical director, vocal coach) that make this production superb and the perfect kickoff for the NST's two summer productions.

Tickets are available at the Blue Hill Public Library. Additional performances are July 13, 14, 15, 27, 29 and Aug, 11, 12, 17, 18. Call 374-5556 for tickets.