

New Surry Theater is another reason to visit Blue Hill

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Review by [Nan Lincoln](#)

BLUE HILL — No one should need an excuse to make the drive from MDI to Blue Hill. It's a nice trip and Blue Hill is a lovely town with great shops, galleries and restaurants to check out. But anyone who needs yet another reason to make the trip should add great theater to the list.

Bill Raiten's New Surry Theater has returned to the Blue Hill Town Hall Theater this summer with two plays in repertory.

One is the hilarious Ken Ludwig farce *Lend Me A Tenor*, the other is the poignant "tragic-comedy" *The Gin Game*.

Both opened last weekend and will play alternating weekends through July and August.

The intimate Town Hall Theater is an excellent venue for both of these plays — one of which is set in a hotel room suite, the other in a nursing home lounge.

Thus far I've only made the trip once to see *Lend Me a Tenor*, and let me tell you, it's a doozy.

In classically farce style the play involves mistaken identities, misunderstandings and misbehavior — in this case centered upon the arrival of the great tenor, Tito Merelli (Herb Mitchell), who is booked for a fundraising performance of *Othello* that very evening. Assigned to keep the temperamental tenor out of trouble, and out of the booze is Max (Julian Chapman), who in the course of that nightmare night ends up on stage in blackface himself, impersonating Merelli, whom he thinks has died on his watch.

Now it's a really big stretch to think anyone could possibly mistake the slender, 18-year-old Julian Chapman, for the beefy 60 something Herb Mitchell, but those who have been able to accept that Superman can hide behind a pair of horn-rim glasses, should be able to deal with this and have a great time.

Mr. Mitchell is completely convincing as the barbiturate befuddled Tito — even to the point of some rather nice singing — although, thankfully most of the singing was provided by lyric tenor and music director for the show, Sheldon Bisberg.

Somehow, even underneath his *Othello* afro and black face, Mr. Mitchell managed to pull off a beautifully nuanced performance. The look of sheer bewilderment on his face when everyone congratulates him on the fine performance he gave, but he can't remember being present for, is unforgettable.

Young Mr. Chapman holds his own pretty darn well too, although he could tone down the nerdy facial ticks and shrillness a bit. He's a handsome kid, and as the romantic lead shouldn't geek himself up so much that one can't imagine him ever getting the girl. He gets perilously close to Jerry Lewis spastic, when he should be more like Hugh Grant awkward or, going way back, Cary Grant cute as in *Bringing up Baby*. It should be noted however that the line of young girls sitting next to me giggled and guffawed at Mr. Chapman's every move, So I may be all wrong about his losing his appeal.

And speaking of getting the girl, Jenny Smick, as Max's love interest Maggie, is certainly worth getting. With the face of a Botticelli Venus, Miss Smick is just perfect as the star-struck young woman who is a little too eager to lose her virginity to

a celebrity.

Dennis Harrington, as her bombastic father, is also perfectly cast and the scene where he tries to 're-kill' what he thinks is the corpse of Tito Morelli is the funniest in the play — and that's saying a lot.

Cindy Robbins, who manages to reinvent herself in every role she plays, transforms herself this time into an Anna Magnani type character as the wife of Tito, alternately burning with red hot desire or anger.

Shari John and June Carter were great as seductresses with varying degrees of ridiculousness. And while the 30s style costuming and makeup throughout the play is superb, I couldn't help thinking that if they'd given Ms. Carter some marcell waves and a lot more powder, she'd have looked just like the marvelous Margaret Dumont from all those Marx Bros. movies.

Jim Fisher was fun as the singing, mincing bellhop who also seemed to have a crush on the visiting tenor.

Anyway, it's all great fun and I look forward to seeing what director Bill Raiten and his New Surry Theater does with The Gin Game.

Performances are scheduled for:

Lend Me a Tenor by Ken Ludwig: Opens July 6, 2007

Performing in July 13, 14, 15, 27, 29

Performing in Aug. 11, 12, 17 & 18

The Gin Game by D. L. Coburn Opens July 8, 2007

Performing - July 20, 21, 22, 28

Performing in Aug. 3, 5, 10

Friday & Saturday Performances at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.- all tickets: \$18.00

Call: 374-5556 or check www.newsurrytheatre.org