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RIKKILEETRAVOLTA

Metropolis 'Noises Off' is a Lesson in Hilarity

Noises Off by playwright Michael Frayn is arguably the funniest stage farce to date. Under the skillful direction of Joe Lehman, the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre staging goes to great lengths to prove this true.

The premise of the show is that a beloved U.K. television actress uses her savings to produce and star in a touring production of the fictional play *Nothing On*. The actress, Dotty, surrounds herself with a less than stellar cast of television actors under the direction of a director on the downside of his career. As one can imagine, it's a recipe for disaster.

Noises Off unfolds in three acts. We first meet the cast of *Nothing On* at the last rehearsal before opening. The weary band of thespians and their frustrated director have given up on perfection and are just trying to get through the show once before they open.

In Act II, the audience gets a peak at the backstage antics of the troupe during one of their performances. Personalities have started to clash, romantic relationships have soured, and mayhem begins to unfold – all while the actors valiantly try to keep the show running.

Finally, in Act III we get to see the final performance of *Nothing On* from the audience's point of view. Anything and everything that could go wrong, does.

The Metropolis production of *Noises Off* features a near perfect cast. Julie Partyka is brilliant as the veteran television star starring in and underwriting the production. Her multidimensional characterization sets the tone for the whole show.

As Lloyd Dallas, the director of the play within a play, Guy Wicke provides a lesson in exasperated emotions. Lloyd's backstage helpers Company & Stage Manager Tim and Assistant Stage Manager Poppy are skillfully played by Evan Cullinan and Kelsey Tuma.

Rian Jairell stands out among a terrific cast as Frederick, a somewhat dimwitted but still endearing leading man with a penchant for noise bleeds. Sarah Kmiecik also turns in a perfectly focused performance as Brooke – a gorgeous yet almost talentless young ingénue whose biggest claim to fame is her lack of wardrobe in a beer commercial.

Tom Ochocinski provides quality comic relief as Selsdon, a borderline senile senior actor with a taste for hard spirits. Meg Elliott punches her timecard as Belinda, the one sane member of the cast trying to keep everyone else from sinking the ship.

Act III belongs to Neil Stratman as Garry Lejeune, a young romantic lead who earned his role *in Nothing On* via a May-December romance with the show's financier and headlining star, Dotty. Stratman's pratfalls are the stuff of legends. I only wish there was more physical hint of the Dotty/Garry romance early on in the production.

From the non-stop laughter of the audience on press night, it is clear that Metropolis has a hit on their hands. The production is a testament to the collaborative efforts of the cast and production staff.

Worth mentioning are Evan Frank (Scenic Designer), Chelsea Lynn (Lighting Designer), Colin Bradley Meyer (Costume Designer), David Moreland (Technical Director), Theresa Neumayer (Properties Designer), Saren Nofs-Snyder (Dialect Coach), and Sarah Putts (Sound Designer).

If you've never been to Metropolis, *Noises Off* is the perfect excuse to take in one of the best companies in the Chicagoland area. Metropolis' *Noises Off* could well be Chicago's funniest show of the year.

Noises Off plays through March 14. Evening performances are Thursday – Saturday at 7:30 PM. Saturday matinees are at 3:00 PM and Sunday matinees are at 2 PM. There is no evening performance on Sundays.

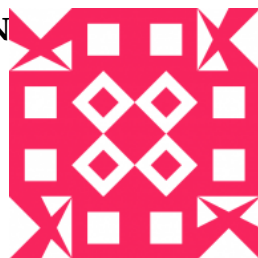
Metropolis Performing Arts Centre is located in the heart of Chicago's northwest suburbs in downtown Arlington Heights (111 West Campbell Street). Free parking is available on street or in the public garage behind the theatre. For more information about Metropolis and a complete performance schedule visit www.MetropolisArts.com (<http://www.MetropolisArts.com>) or call the Box Office at (847) 577-2121.

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