

Madness is a Shear Pleasure

by Michael C. Sherrin



The cast of *Shear Madness* creates a unique show every night in this fantastically absurd play.

Solve a murder mystery while drinking alcohol and laughing uncontrollably - now that makes for good theater. *Shear Madness*, the longest running nonmusical play in history has become a Boston staple and justifiably so. Celebrating its 25th anniversary, *Shear Madness* shows no signs of age or wear. This is a must see for all Bostonians, even if you have before.

Taking place in a unisex hair salon, the audience must help solve the murder of a famous pianist. The suspects are the gay hair stylist and owner, another stylist, a business man, and a socialite, each with their own motive for committing the murder. During the intermission, the suspects and detective remain in character discussing the case with the audience. Once Act II begins, the audience has the chance to interrogate the suspects, contributing to the resolution of the case.

Shear Madness' interactivity makes the show worth repeated visits. Since the murderer changes before each performance, there is always a mystery to enjoy and new questions to ask. First-timers are likewise in for a treat with one of the most unique and innovative stage experiences. Unlike most interactive theater, there is no requirement for audience members to participate. Instead, you can just sit back and enjoy the entertainment of other people interacting with the actors in front of them. However, if your interest is peaked, don't forget that drinks are served right at your table to help loosen you up.

The skill of the actors shows in their interactions with the audience during the intermission. Some characters remained on stage sulking about being locked in the hair salon while others moved into the audience. Tony Witcomb, the gay hair stylist, walked around asking people who they thought committed the murder, offering his own input to sway popular opinion away from him as a suspect. Then he gave out pieces of candy, ever the politician.

More than the mystery, the greatest part of *Shear Madness* is the incredible comedy performed by an even more incredible cast. With a mix of improvisation and scripted behavior, this ensemble delivers

up-to-date jokes, keeping the long-running show seemingly fresh for the present day. When talking about ways to kill a person, Witcomb lists running for President of the Ukraine and taking a Celebrex. Even Detective Rossetti's reference to the Spice Girls triggers more laughs seeing it as nostalgic instead of trendy. In fact, most cast members have had some part in the show since the late eighties.

The characters have particular appeal as they play into their archetypes. The girl hair stylist pops her gum and twists her hair; the gay hair stylist flirts with the detective (even managing to get a kiss that seemed to shock the rest of the cast out of character for a moment). *Shear Madness* resembles a modernized *Clue* mixed with worthwhile dinner theater as each character stands out as a spoof of murder suspects in the past. Even the detective plays into the incompetent stereotype, messing up details of the case and the dialogue. For example, Detective Rossetti mistook a reference to Lebanese terrorists for lesbian lovers.

In addition to the incredible play and acting, *Shear Madness* deserves praise for an incredibly detailed set when the bare minimum would have sufficed for the show. The stage was adorned with two barber chairs, working sinks for shampooing, seating areas, and a wide assortment of hair care products. Much of these props went to good use for comedic relief, including a great version of the pie in the face using shaving cream. Characters had their hair washed and curled right on stage, creating surprising realism in a fantastically absurd play.

Shear Madness can appeal to almost any fan of mysteries, comedies, or theater in general. The breadth of *Shear Madness*' comedy makes it entertaining for a huge range of audiences. The experience is one-of-a-kind and worth experiencing over and over again.

Shear Madness is playing at the Charles Playhouse in Boston. For more info call 617-426-5225 or check out www.shearmadness.com.

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