

THEATER REVIEW

'Enchanting April' Is Bewitching

By SUE PASCOE
Staff Writer

From the moment the luminous Genevieve Levin steps on the stage as Lotty Wilton, the audience knows it will be enmeshed in an almost flawless Theatre Palisades performance of "Enchanted April" at Pierson Playhouse.

The actors, the director Gail Bernardi and the technical staff have put together one of the strongest community theater shows in recent history. It is a delightful way to spend an evening.

"Enchanted April," a 1922 novel by Elizabeth von Arnim was adapted as a Broadway play in 1925 and a radio film in 1935. It was turned into a popular film in 1992 and then ran again on Broadway in 2003.

The plot is simple. World War I is over and people are settling back into their lives in London, when Wilton discovers a newspaper advertisement for a "small medieval Italian castle on the shores of the Mediterranean to be let furnished for the month of April."

When a story is simple, the acting and directing have to be top-notch. Bernardi, in her first time directing at Pierson Playhouse, knows the essence of this romantic play and allows it to subtly unfold. She also knows how to balance her actors' performances, and the characters ring true and are fun to watch.

Levin, in her first appearance on the Palisades stage, is the fulcrum around which the play revolves. Her charming performance as the earnest woman who seeks a change from her dreary life in London, in a marriage gone stale, is sparkling.

She becomes convinced that by going away to the magically



The landlord of the Italian villa, Antony Wilding (Michael Willens), accepts a check from Englishwomen Lotty Wilton (Genevieve Levin) and Rose Arnott (Maria Pavone) in the Theatre Palisades production of "Enchanted April" at Pierson Playhouse.

Photo: Joy Dauns

described Italian castle her life will change.

Wilton convinces a dour member of her woman's club, Rose Arnott (Maria Pavone), whom she barely knows, to join her on the journey. When they realize the cost of a month's rental, they convince two other strangers, Lady Caroline Bramble (Heather Barnett) and Mrs. Graves (Julia Whitcombe), to also come and help with expenses.

As the cantankerous Mrs. Graves, Whitcombe is perfect. This woman can act! Equally up to their roles are Pavone and Barnett, respectively.

As barrister Mellersh Wilton (Michael Allen), the actor's change from pompous to slightly less pompous is hysterical, especially as he tries to gain a new client while wearing only a towel.

Whether speaking fluent Italian or just being the proper Englishman, the landlord of the castle, Antony Wilding (Michael Willens), does it with ease. The third man in the cast, Frederick Arnott (Greg Abbott), plays his character with the perfect amount of smarminess.

Also great fun is the interchange between Costanza (Jenny Marlowe), a feisty and lively young woman who only speaks Italian, and Mrs. Graves.

The costuming is lovely, especially Lady Caroline's and Mrs. Graves' dresses. Designing period costumes can be a challenge, but

June Lissandrello has captured it perfectly.

The lighting design by Sherman Wayne properly captures the dreary England in the first act and the sunny Italy coast in the second. Likewise, sound design by Susan Stangl with the rain in the background added a dimension to the show without being a distraction.

Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. through December 16. If you are looking for a way to ease holiday stress, consider a night of live theatre and director Bernardi's words: "We hope you leave the theater this evening with a renewed belief in 'hope' and the certainty of 'enchantment' in our every-changing world."

Tickets: Call (310) 454-1970 or visit theatrepalisades.org.

Violinist Lee Performs