

'Women in Jeopardy!' delivers nonstop laughs

By KATHLEEN PALMER

Staff Writer

LOWELL, Mass. – I'm warning you now, audience members: Wear waterproof mascara.

Merrimack Repertory Theatre's "Women in Jeopardy!" will have you laughing off all remnants of your Maybelline, guaranteed. The attendees at the sold-out performance this reviewer was at were literally rocking in their seats with laughter. In fact, the cast may have to be reminded to "hold for laughs" in several rapid-fire exchanges.

The riotous comedy follows Mary and Jo, two middle-aged women who are worried that their best friend Liz has taken up with a creepy – and potentially murderous – dentist named Jackson. When Liz brings him to "Chardonnay Tuesday" at Mary's house – essentially ruining the women's long-held tradition of ladies' night – her friends start piecing together disturbing facts about the mysterious disappearance of one of his dental hygienists, his apparent loathsome apathy about it, and his uncomfortable lechery towards Liz (who absolutely loves it). Reluctant to push the issue with Liz, and possibly push her even farther away, Mary and Jo decide to take the investigation into their own hands.

Wendy MacLeod wrote the play upon a revelation: Brilliant middle-aged actresses are a hugely untapped resource for the American theater. The trio helming "Women in Jeopardy!" are perfect examples, and are perfectly cast. Jessica Wortham plays Mary, a

IF YOU GO

Merrimack Repertory Theatre presents 'Women in Jeopardy!'

WHEN: Weds.-Suns., through March 12. See website for dates and times.

WHERE: Nancy L. Donahue Theatre, 50 E. Merrimack St., Lowell, Mass.

COST: \$26-\$70; \$15 students. Discounts for seniors, groups, military.

TICKETS: Call 1-978-654-4678 or online at bit.ly/2lo8ktL.

INFORMATION: Call 1-978-654-4678, email info@mrt.org or visit www.mrt.org.

t-shirt and sweatpants gal, with the lovable urgency of a Valerie Bertinelli. Julia Brothers is Jo, who absolutely has the best lines in the show. Her deadpan, ascerbic delivery slayed me every time. When

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the hygienist's possible abductor is being discussed, Jo asserts it has to be a man: "Women don't kill strangers," she states. "Women kill husbands." And the bit where Jo drinks Liz's repeatedly-filled wine glass is stellar. Gail Rastorfer's Liz has self-admitted "trust issues" after leaving her cheating ex, but her new man has rekindled her fire big time. Her unleashed sexuality is bold and hilarious, and Rastorfer's slamming body is shown to great effect by costume designer Deborah Newhall.

The cast also includes funny turns by Ashley Shamoon, Liz's ditz – and equally slamming



Photos courtesy of MEGHAN MOORE

ABOVE: From left, Julia Brothers as Jo, Gail Rastorfer as Liz and Jessica Wortham as Mary, are "Women in Jeopardy!" at Merrimack Repertory Theatre through March 12.

BELOW: Rastorfer and Lou Sumrall as Jackson.

– daughter Amanda, who Mary and Jo are worried is in harm's way by her proximity to Jackson. He's portrayed by Lou Sumrall, doing terrific at double-duty roles as not only the suspected dentist, but as the sergeant investigating the case. Some clever stage trickery allows Sumrall to disappear and reappear as his other character. Rounding out the cast is Jacob York, who plays Amanda's meathead of an ex-boyfriend Trenner with snowboarder-dude perfection. I loved when he changed the inflection/ accent of some of his end phrases; I'll leave you to discover that.

MRT artistic director Sean Daniels directs,

and keeps the actors clipping right along, as is necessary with comedy. We did lose a couple lines following laughter outbursts, though; a good problem to have, all things considered. Once again, scene changes are handled expertly with the fun, funny distraction of characters performing appropriate-to-them dance routines.

It's another slam-dunk of a set for MRT, this one created by set designer Michael B. Raiford and featuring lights (used well during scene changes) by Brian J. Lilienthal and David Remedios on sound. Mary's kitchen looks real and beautiful, and the Utah forest the characters find themselves in



later is represented by giant aspen trees that twinkle with a night sky full of stars.

Ladies Night is this Thursday, with complimentary wine and sweet treats from Sweet Lydia's of Lowell. The 1-hour,

45-minute performance includes one intermission. Don't miss this hilarious show. The only thing in jeopardy is your makeup. Kathleen Palmer can be reached at 594-1255, kpalmernashua@nashuatelegraph.com or @NHFoodandFun and @Telegraph_KathP.