

'The Drowsy Chaperone' takes you to another world

By **BILL LOCKWOOD**

SPRINGFIELD, Vt. — The Springfield Community Players will open their 99th. season with a production of "The Drowsy Chaperone," book by Bob Martin and Don McKellar, lyrics and music by Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison, April 19, 20, and 27 at 7 p.m. and April 27 and 28 at 2 p.m. in their Player's Studio Theater 165 South Street in Springfield.

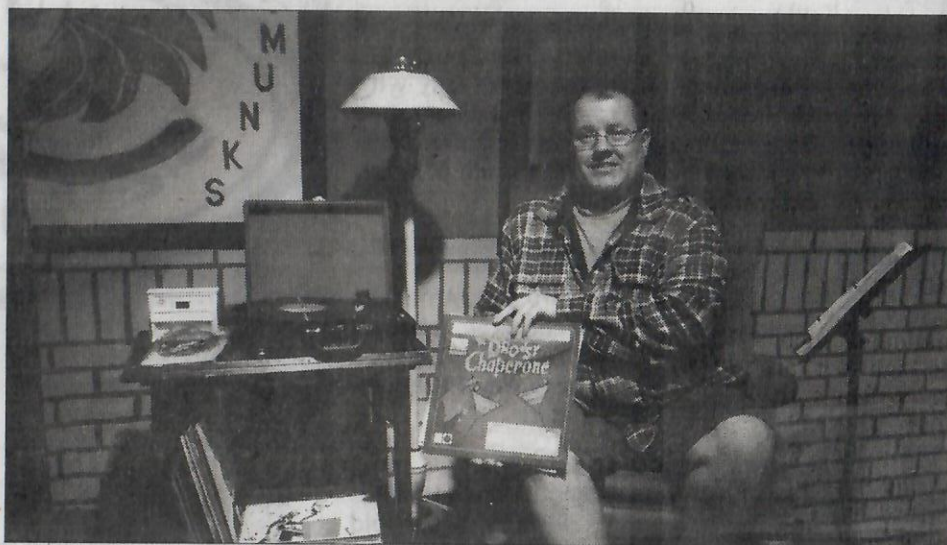
The musical debuted in 1998 at the Rivoli in Toronto and was billed as a parody of musical comedy of the late 1920s. Much of its humor comes from spoofing the musicals of those times, and, in fact, other times as well. The plot centers around a middle-aged asocial musical comedy fan playing a record of his favorite 1928 hit musical, "The Drowsy Chaperone," and the fictional musical itself comes to life with two lovers on the eve of their wedding, a bumbling best man, a desperate theater producer, a not so bright hostess, two gangsters posing as pastry chefs, a misguided Don Juan, and an intoxicated chaperone on the stage as the record plays. It opened

on Broadway May 1, 2006 and that year won five Tony Awards and seven Drama Desk Awards and was nominated for Best Musical and co-writer Bob Martin for Best Performance by a Leading Actor in the lead role.

This show is directed by the Players Music Director Parker Eastman. "I've wanted to do 'The Drowsy Chaperone' since I was in the 8th grade," he said. "The music and orchestrations are pure genius, and it has a great, interesting concept. Not to mention a surprise during the number 'Toledo Surprise.'"

Seated among the actors at the rear of the stage is The Man in the Chair, an actor in the role of a Broadway musical fan who is basically narrator, or even, perhaps, the old Greek chorus, commenting on the action and inevitably being drawn into it himself. Players regular Todd Hutchinson plays the role. He says the role has a lot of monologues, "a lot more talking than I'm used to." And "I've had fun. It's been a challenge. It's making me more of an actor because of that."

Others in the cast include new and returning members of the company.



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Todd Hutchinson plays the role of "The Man in the Chair" in the musical "The Drowsy Chaperone" at Springfield Community Players.

Irene Ramen, who plays Trix the Aviatrix. "At 85 it's still fun to be in the theater," she said. "I love the stage. I love the stories, and I love working with younger people." Rachel Hawkins, who plays Kitty, the would-be leading lady with a New York accent, is much younger but still not a newcomer to the theater. "This is my second show in a long time," she said. "I'm having a lot of fun with it, and my character gets to do a fun accent." John Savastinuk, who plays Aldolpho, the

misguided Don Juan said. "It's a really fun show. We all have a fun time singing and dancing." He added, "This show is especially great for people who like theater." Laura Carbonneau, who plays Janet Van De Graff, the prospective bride who calls off the wedding when she believes her to be husband has been untrue, said, "It's a play within a play, different characters playing even more ridiculous people." Jeanie Levesque, who plays Mrs. Tottendale, the clueless hostess,

said of the play, "It's very cleverly written. It's like a valentine to musicals rather than a spoof. It manages to take all the ridiculous and silly things about musicals, the stock characters and scenes, and makes them lovable so you're laughing with them rather than at their expense."

The Drowsy Chaperone is played by Morganna Ekkins who is just coming off the role of Velma Kelly in Main Street Arts production of "Chicago" at the Bellows Falls Opera House.

That and this are very different shows in scale, subject, and the size of the venue. Brothers Andrew and Dimitri Freeman play two gangsters who appear disguised as pastry chefs who bake the "Toledo Surprise". Rounding out the cast are Brandon Norman, Don Gray, Carl Tropper, and Barbara Ball.

The Man in the Chair has a line near the end that sums up what all the cast seem to think, "And that's what this show is, it's just fun ... It takes you to another world, and that's what a show is supposed to do." Levesque noted that there is both an optimistic and poignant message to the play as well. Indeed the lyrics of the final song include, "As we stumble along on life's funny journey... Best that we can do is hope the bluebird of happiness will sing his song."

Eastman is also directing the Players next production, "The Wizard of Oz" opening May 24.

Reservations may be made on line at www.springfieldcommunityplayers.org/tickets. Or by calling the Ticket Box Office at 866-967-8167.