

By **BILL LOCKWOOD**

Last Friday, the Springfield Community Players concluded their ninety-ninth season opening with an original comedy, quite a comedy actually, "Hotel Anonymous," by local and new playwright Andrew Freeman. It will continue at their Studio Theater in Springfield, Vermont on Saturday, Nov. 9, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 10, at 2 p.m.

The opening night performance showed it to be a wacky and totally enjoyable comedy. Freeman not only wrote but also directed this play. In these roles, he has created a real ensemble piece, cleverly conceived and well paced by a group of really good actors, all of whom approached their parts with a lot of energy and all of whom fit their parts well.

Billed as a murder mystery, one might immediately think Agatha Christie — a group of people cut off from the outside world, a murder and the search for which one of them is the killer. But no, this setting is a reality TV show where 13 people are locked in an old hotel, a Vermont Inn, for a week of filming.

But then there's a murder.

It becomes a murder mystery wrapped in a reality TV show. Someone must have done it, and we are back to Agatha Christie again. It is a good spoof of reality TV and Agatha Christie murder mystery-type plays alike. It also manages to spoof commercials, one with the Stage Manager Matt LaClair making a cameo appearance, as does Andrew Freeman.

An over-the-top host, played by Andrew's brother, Dmitri Freeman, leads the group, known to each other only as their various everyday roles in life: a lawyer, a professor, a poet, a preacher and even a cowboy — who is played by Andrew's other brother, Gabriel Freeman.

"[The characters] are



SPRINGFIELD COMMUNITY PLAYERS

The cast of Andrew Freeman's "Hotel Anonymous" at Springfield Community Players in Springfield, Vermont.

all lovable losers," Jeanie Levesque, who plays an aspiring ear model with a Greek accent, said. They do all make themselves loveable, each in their own way. The script gives each a moment to shine, and they all do it well. Some roles are larger than others, but, as with any good ensemble, the presentation is good throughout.

Andrew Freeman is, at least this year, a regular with the Springfield Community Players. He has appeared in two of the other shows this season. He was a comedic wise-cracking pastry chef in the musical "The Drowsy Chaperone" and he played Spike, a distraction to the famous actress, Masha, in "Vanya, and Sonia, and Masha, and Spike." As for writing, Freeman says this is his first full-length script. He previously wrote two 10-minute plays in a program at Weston Playhouse. He has been an actor and worked with youth as a director for seven years. In the past Freeman has directed three youth Shakespeare productions in Rutland.

Speaking of "Hotel Anonymous," Freeman says the play is a black comedy that focuses on laughs. Though he says he kept in mind the wisdom that "the tone stays dramatic, but don't undercut it with a joke." Freeman says his brother Dimitri, who plays the lead, the TV host, gave him the original idea. He wanted it to be a murder mystery, but through the writing and rehearsal periods it "completely changed."

With all said, Freeman is "really happy with the result." He has pretty much the cast he had in mind during the writing. He also says he created a minimal set focusing on dialog and performances. His cast is a mix of current and former Springfield High School drama students — as he is a former student himself — and community and Springfield Players regulars.

Barbara Ball, who plays a firefighter and had roles in the same two shows Andrew Freeman was in this season, says this is her first time in an original play.

"I think it's really cool.

Each time I look it over, I get something new out of it." Adding, she is "totally impressed with Andy writing it, with his vision. It makes you feel good about yourself."

Laura Carbonneau, who plays a politician's wife and was one of the leads in "The Drowsy Chaperone," echoes

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Ball's comments about being in an original, saying it "is a new experience for me. I had no preconceived notion of what the characters should be, and the characters have changed over the rehearsal process. It's funny, I'm having a hard time not seeing it as an audience member would. I'm having a lot of fun."

Original plays have no "out-of-town tryouts" as do those on Broadway, and it is to Freeman's credit that he was able to bring it through the process with just rehearsals to the product it became. John MacDonald, president of the Springfield Community Players, says they are excited to be presenting the second original work of this four-production season.

"We encourage our community to be creative," MacDonald said. "We are active in our community and feel good that people are comfortable to come to us and try things."

MacDonald says he wants the audience to understand that this show has been an educational experience, an educational workshop presented in a performance.

Springfield Community Players funded this production as an educational workshop through a grant from the Ben and Jerry's Foundation.

"I am very excited we have a large number of actors new to our stage," MacDonald said. "Nine-out-of-thirteen are new here and bring a new generation to the organization."

MacDonald says he feels the Players "have had a good and successful season."

Tickets and reservations are available by calling 802-885-4098 or online through springfieldcommunityplayers.org/tickets. The Studio Theatre is located at 165 South Street in Springfield, Vermont.