

oh! My Giddy Aunt

.....à ॠॡॢॣ ।॥ ॥० ॥ॡॢॣ

Kālīdās, the Indo-American Community Theatre Group of Rochester, presented its latest play on Dec 5th, 6th, 7th and 12th. With just over two years and five plays under its belt, the group continues to make these fascinating productions seem effortless!

For those who do not recall, Kālīdās' debut was on November 17, 2006, with Neil Simon's *Rumors*. In 2007, the group's productions were *What's in a Name* (by our community's very own playwright Dr. V. V. Raman) in May and Ray Cooney's *Run For Your Wife* in December. Earlier this year, we enjoyed a superb adaptation of William Dinner's *Too Soon for Daisies* directed by Janani Parthasarathi.

The second Ray Cooney play selected by the group, *My Giddy Aunt*, is definitely a challenging project for any amateur group to undertake. This was one of four West End plays that Ray co-wrote with John Roy Chapman, known for bringing unbridled but often complicated fun to Whitehall in the 50s and 60s. Kālīdās took the challenge and came through with flying colors, under Baal Bhagat's flawless direction!

The version of the play presented at the ICC was a musical adaptation of the original script by Mildred Kayden. In my opinion, the play was not fast paced (definitely not like watching the *whirling dervish*, who personify both the original and current meaning of the word *giddy*- god possessed and dizzy). *Giddy*, in this context, was the *loony* aunt- *Lady Eppingham*-portrayed gracefully by Erica Wagner.

Despite the slow pace, the hilarity and music, when combined with two murders, captured the audience's attention, including that of my 13 year old son, Nikhil, and the only other teenager I saw at the next table.

The comedy thriller is centered around Lady Hester, the daffy mistress of a tea plantation in British India. Following her husband's murder, she's bilked by two wacky nephews who scheme to having her committed to an institution or doing her in by hiding a poisonous spider on her hat.

The older nephew *Martin Eppingham* was played by Arun Vachher, who outdid his stellar Kālīdās debut as the Doctor in *Too Soon for Daisies*. The pleasant surprise of the evening was the superb performance by Bradley Buchheit, who played the younger nephew *Jeremy Eppingham* and had me convinced that he must have hailed from Cornwall, England (and not Corvallis, Oregon).

The story takes on a twist when we learn that Lady Hester inherited the plantation following her father's demise. The solicitor, *Basil Landau* (played by Samir Bhagwat) who brings this news from London stays with us for the rest of the play and blossoms into a very entertaining character.

Very soon, there's another turn, when *Vana Singh*, a glamorous investigator played by Shalini Bhattacharya, brings in the singing lark. Enter the psychic from Indiana, *Crystal McCloud* (played by Julia Fitch), Lady Eppingham's half sister who arrives to claim her right to manage the tea estate. It is hard to believe that this is Julia's first appearance in a play. She sailed across the stage with ease, with expert timing and sure-fire delivery of her musical lyrics.

The unscrupulous nephews are unmasked slowly and see their plots unravel in the second half. Lady Hester and the crooked *Doctor Caradine* they hired to put her away (Dr. Tarun Kothari) are both mysteriously murdered. Lo and behold, Lady Eppingham's faithful servant *Rahmu* (a powerful representation by Mihir Shah) is the "butler who'd done it".

In classic Cooney and Chapman's twisted and knotted style, we learn along the way that Lady Hester's husband had an affair with the native Rahmu's sister and fathered *Vana Singh*. The pleasant surprise ending had less to do with the dark and sinister *Rahmu* and more to do with the wonderful way the solicitor *Basil Landau* "outed" him. If you were not at one of the four showings, you'll just have to wait for another production of *My Giddy Aunt*, to find out how Basil revealed this to Crystal. Personally, I can't wait for Spring 2009 and Kālīdās' next ICC production!