

PLAY REVIEWS

'Humble' production, impressive presentation

By Marcus Kalipolites
For the Times Herald-Record

New Paltz – It's not by happenstance that Charlotte Jones named her play "Humble Boy." After all, the main character, Felix Humble, besides being an astrophysicist, is also, at his core, modest, weak and confused about the future. He even tried to kill himself.

By play's end and following the funeral of his father, Felix does connect with a mother who, for much of his life, ignored him and betrayed his father. Only in reconciliation does Felix eventually find his "Eureka moment."

Having premiered in London in 2001, the six-character play made its United States debut in May 2003. With a production by Mohonk Mountain Stage Company, it is receiving its first presentation in the Hudson Valley. On Saturday night at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, the Readers Theatre Group captured all the wit and humor, anxiety and intrigue of this work, which won a Critics' Circle Best New Play Award.

The nonstaged production is acted out by performers situated on stools and only rarely perusing scripts. But even with no stage fixtures and special lighting, the players are thoroughly convincing. When engaged in conversation, actors look at one another in but never touch. And when not taking part in the action, they turn their backs to the audience.

As Felix, Sean Marrinan expresses a variety of emotions. He stammers and stutters the frustration of dealing with an unsympathetic mother. But Marrinan's Felix also delivers a mumble-free and impressive description of the string theory. Distress marks the telling of attempted suicide, uncertainty plagues any romantic relationship, and fury follows the receiving of a "gift" (the urn) from his mother.

Christine Crawfis plays Flora Humble, Felix's mother, as a crude woman faulting Felix for being fat, unkempt and even too analytical. Easy to criticize, the woman who neither mothered well nor honored her marriage comes across as insensitive, especially in describing the death of her husband with cool and impersonal detachment.

In playing George Pye, the neighbor who would marry Flora, Ron Schade is as persistent in pursuing Flora as he is cruel in urging Felix to jump off a cliff. He also promotes



Photo provided

Starring in "Humble Boy" for the Readers Theatre Group of the Mohonk Mountain Stage Company are, front row, Heather Berry and Sean Marrinan; center, Christine Crawfis; and, back row from left, William Connors, Ron Schade and Elizabeth Barrows.

If you go ...

What: "Humble Boy"

Starring: Sean Marrinan, Christine Crawfis, Heather Berry; Ron Schade, Elizabeth Barrows, William Connors

Directed by: Robert G. Miller

Where: St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 163 Main St., New Paltz

When: 8 p.m. Oct. 21-23

Tickets: \$5-\$10

Call: 255-3102

the "hose-hooked-up-to the car" method of self-destruction for his would-be son-in-law.

It had been George's daughter that mothered Felix's baby, but with the raising of 7-year-old Felicia by herself, Rosie, as played by Heather Berry, had grown independent and assertive. She faults Felix for being too cerebral.

Now, while the plot is layered with failed relationships, the interactions sparkle with humor and witty dialogue. Much of the levity comes from Mercy, Elizabeth Barrows' character, who offers to make sandwiches as a way of side-tracking conflict. And black humor finds her preparing soup with "spicy" ingredients from a honey jar on the table.

Directing the well-rehearsed cast, which includes William Connors as an indulgent gardener, is Robert G. Miller, who has molded here a presentation worth seeing.