

# Review of WIT

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New Paltz – A production by the Readers Theatre Group is a unique experience. The performers, all dressed in black, appear on a bare stage with minimal lighting. They wait seated onstage until they move to music stands to read their lines. With this type of presentation, the audience is able to listen to the playwright's words without visual distraction. Furthermore, the readers convey the characters' emotions through subtleties of speech and expression.

Some plays could suffer from the lack of theatrical trappings and movement. The challenge is to choose wisely.

"Wit," a Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Margaret Edson, has been chosen by the Readers Theatre Group of Mohonk Mountain Stage Company to perform at Unison Arts and Learning Center in New Paltz. Eight readers portray more than a dozen characters.

Christine Crawfis leads the cast as Dr. Vivian Bearing, a professor of English who has been diagnosed with Stage 4 ovarian cancer. The play follows her treatment and eventual death. Crawfis bestows Vivian with great depth and dignity. With expert acting skills she steers the emotional roller-coaster ride Vivian feels at the hands of her caregivers.

Rick Meyer as Dr. Jason Posner, a former student of Bearing, manages his clinical brusqueness well without turning the doctor into a villain or an unlikable character. As Susie Monahan, the nurse in charge of the patient, Elizabeth Barrows effortlessly conveys humor and warmth.

Don Wildy does double duty as Bearing's father and her primary doctor. He is particularly fine in a tender flashback that takes place during bedtime story hour between father and daughter. Barbara Scanlan as E.M. Ashford, Bearing's mentor, is perfect. The play allows the audience to see her in flashback in an academic setting and then in a hospital visit she makes to Bearing's bedside. This scene is handled brilliantly by both women. Bearing is in apparent acute pain, which Ashford soothes as she reads from a children's book, "The Runaway Bunny."

Laurence Carr, Jessica Napolitano and Janet Nurre deftly juggle multiple roles as students and various medical staff members.

Director RoseMarie Navarra has assembled an exceptional cast of gifted readers whose overall presentation is poignant. This group and its production of "Wit" is a superior example of Readers Theatre at its very best.