

*Married Alive* Will Have You Shaking in Your Boots—With Laughter

By Robert McKinney

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Although taphophobes have only the title's reference to fear in this Barter take on tying the proverbial matrimonial knot, gamophobes and anuptophobes may quake, but it will be the geliophobes among us who had better avoid a two-block area around the Barter when this production is going on.

Geliophobia, in case you played hooky that day in Psychiatry 101, is the morbid fear of laughter and, no, I don't really know all those big words, but it is 2:16 AM--in the morning! and several thousand fence-hurling lamb chops just haven't done the trick. I often write my reviews during the wee hours; now you know.

Even if the title of the play doesn't tip you off that it is going to be a hoot, the opening few minutes should, especially when both bride and groom at the wedding ceremony whip out long scrolls, each containing their own self-penned vows with phrases such as "I vow to be the Ken to your Barbie."

If your preference in humor is on the darker side you won't care for this lively and beautiful romp through the perils of matrimony, making two careers, family and all the rest somehow mesh, and growing old happily—and happily old—together. And, oh yes, it's a musical with some songs that are purely fun, some that touch a sentimental nerve and none that are all that serious or memorable enough to morph into annoying mental elevator music.

Barter first-timer Amanda Johnson, a graduate of Shenandoah Conservatory of Music (magna cum beautiful), as Erin, just absolutely steals the show with her voice and looks even though Sean Campos, as Paul, demonstrates that he can sing and carry on a conversation while doing one-armed push-ups—very impressive for guys like me who think doing ten using both arms would qualify us for the cover of *Men's Health* magazine. Both these young folks have fantastic voices and Amanda reminds one of a young Goldie Hawn back in the old *Laugh In* days. Ah, those really were the days, but I digress.

Cathy Whelan and Michael Poisson make up the "older" half of this fine cast as Diane and Ron. Whelan is a four-time grandmother—although she certainly doesn't look it—who has gotten back into theatre after being gone long enough to raise a family and she certainly hasn't lost any charm or talent along the way.

Good old Michael Poisson is one of those fine mainstream working actors who seem able to step into any role handed them with equal aplomb. With more than 40 Barter productions under his belt, he has demonstrated his flexibility by playing Ryan in *Liquid Moon*, his flair for drama as Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and that he can be a very funny guy as Felix in *The Odd Couple*.

To be sure, your own take on marriage and your own experiences with the matrimonial merry-go-round, whether you've taken one ride or several, will greatly color how much jocularly you'll derive from *Married Alive*. Some will find some lines funny, others will laugh at others. But you will laugh and of all the things that can make a marriage work, laughing together is probably the most dependable of all.

Katy Brown, the director with the marvelous sense of flow and all the nice touches, is the skipper on this love boat and it shows. But does Katy also have a wicked little sense of humor that spills over—unconsciously perhaps—into even her "Director's Notes" in the program?

In her last line, she writes: Here's to the lovers and dreamers who have taken this risk by saying "I do," not just at the altar, but in the way they live their lives together every day.

She might have meant to write "altar" but who knows? If marriage doesn't "alter" one's life, I can't imagine what might. For the fortunate, and, yep, I include myself, it's an alteration for the better. (Now, Dear, would you please point that blunderbuss some other direction??)

For times, dates and reservations, call 276-628-3991.

Wedding attire is not required and, incidentally, the three big words that opened this early-morning piece mean, in order, mean those who fear being buried alive, being married, and staying single.