

Marvelous cast complements light wittiness of 'In the Mood'

BY PAUL LAMAR
For The Daily Gazette

STOCKBRIDGE — The advance publicity for Kathleen Clark's new 75-minute comedy "In the Mood" often mentions her interest in the humor of Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and Philip Barry's "The Philadelphia Story."

In collaboration with director Marc Bruni and six marvelous actors, Clark has continued to tweak a script that does indeed remind you a bit of those masters' witty repartee, cases of mistaken identity, and self-absorbed upper-class characters embroiled in misery of their own making. It's light and fun.

We're in the beautifully appointed NYC penthouse apartment of Perri (Erin Dilly) and Derek (Damian Young) Rubin, where she is putting the finishing touches on a surprise party for her hubby. Deception No. 1: In order to get him home shortly after the arrival of guests, she has concocted a plan for a contractor to meet him to discuss a remodeling plan, but she has simply hired an actor to play the contractor.

Deception No. 2: Derek unex-

pectedly shows up, however, with mistress Carolyn (Jennifer Shore) in tow. Deception No. 3: Now throw in the soiree's entertainment, pianist Nick Elliot (Stephen R. Buntrock), who, we find out later, once had a romance with Perri; Nick's sister, Sally (Johanna Day), who has just cancelled her impending marriage; and a broken elevator; and you have all the ingredients for silly business. Dramatic irony, anyone?

Clark paces the play well. Just when everything seems to have gone about as wrong as it could have, here comes another character to stir the pot. For example, the actor/contractor, Edward (Arnie Burton), arrives in time to jolt the play to the next level. Ditto, a bit later, Sally. Clark also knows how to set up a one-liner, but humor comes chiefly from the quirky characters.

She has employed a couple of other techniques involving unseen characters, one on the phone and two behind the elevator doors, that didn't work for me — I felt the energy onstage begin to dissipate in those moments, and a 75-minute piece needs to go by like the crack

THEATER REVIEW

of a whip.

Buntrock, whose fine musician-ship comes to the fore in a couple of spots, is an able foil for everyone else's antics. Young does flustered well.

Cody's expressions and sweetly piping voice make her haplessness amusing and endearing. Dilly glues together the proceedings with spot-on timing. Day brings a dollop of drollery to everything Sally says. And Burton basically steals the show as an earnest actor who goes over the top in a contractor outfit worthy of the Village People. His couch/phone routine is priceless, and his deadpan looks score every time.

The gray, white and black set by Lee Savage is Upper West Side elegant. Laurie Churba Kohn's costumes, particularly Carolyn's, are apt. And the sound work, by Scott Killian, and lighting design, by David Lander, are seamless.

When it's good, which is most of the time, "In the Mood" is laugh-out-loud funny. I can see this script having a future.

