



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Narrator Stephen Elliott seconds as a preacher performing the reading of wedding vows to George and Emily, played by Micheal Bombard and Ellen Buechel.

60th annual production

Aquinas Drama Club presents Thornton Wilder's 'Our Town'

By Kevin Myers

In a whimsical, informal style, Stephen Elliott moves from narrator to character in Aquinas Drama Club's production of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." As the narrator ("Stage Manager") of the club's 60th anniversary performance, Elliott invites all to join in the play's affirmation of life and to recapture the sense of exhilaration that may have been lost in the process of growing up.

The play dignifies the living of an ordinary life in America. "It's a celebration of the values of the Church and of family life," said Father James Kelly, director of the play. "It is not necessary to be a president or a congressman to feel as though you've accomplished something."

Although the play was written in 1901 about a "typical" small New Hampshire town called Grovers Corners, the message it conveys today is as effective as it was more than 80 years ago. Father Kelly admitted there may no longer be a typical American town as there was in 1901, but he said that human nature and human emotion have not changed.

The similarity in human interaction and emotion between the two eras could be seen in the faces of the audience Friday, Nov. 15, as individuals laughed and cringed at Wilder's anecdotes of universal human experience. The play avoids extensive stage scenery and references to specific circumstances of the era. By sticking to the basics, the play's message has remained pertinent for several decades. Elliott's character joked about the appearance of the stage, saying "Here are some trellises for you people in the audience who think you have to have extensive stage scenery."

With the limited prop work, the actors had to paint a subliminal picture of Grovers Corners in the audience's imaginations, and the mood of "Our Town" was dependent on the performers' effective portrayal of Wilder's characters. Due to the convincing acting of the entire cast, a clear image of the town was maintained throughout the entire production.

Chronicling the daily events in two neighboring households, the play effectively illustrates the humorous similarity of daily life and sequence of family growth in America. Emily Webb, played by Ellen Buechel, and George Gibbs, played by Michael Bombard, demonstrate life's "normal" pathway — childhood to marriage to death. As Elliott's character explains, "Most everyone in Grovers Corners climbs into their grave married ... you make the decision to get married), and all of a sudden you're 70."

Attempting to depict life's normal sequence, Wilder was essentially forced to include life's inevitable sequel — death. Although this final act lessened the otherwise cheerful air of the play, Father Kelly felt Wilder would have been copping out if he avoided it. "What Wilder wanted to do was avoid copping out on the reality of life," Father Kelly said. Using death as a vehicle for expression, Wilder shows the innate tendency for human beings to take life for granted — slowing down to truly appreciate it only when they are faced with losing it.

Tickets for the Friday, Nov. 22, and Saturday, Nov. 23, showings of "Our Town" at 7:30 p.m. are still available. They may be purchased at the door at \$3, \$2 for senior citizens.

St. Elizabeth Guild

Seventeen visiting Eucharistic ministers were installed as charter members of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Guild of the Church of Christ the King in Rochester. Inspired by the life and works of St. Elizabeth, the guild was founded to meet the needs of parishioners and their families who are unable to participate in Eucharistic liturgy due to illness or incapacitation, either long- or short-term.

Guild members have prepared for this ministry for the past three months. Chairpersons are Jeanette Wojtas and Marge Stewart. Call (716)423-4456 for more information.

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