

Farmington Players

'Anastasia' Gets Aura Of Life

The history books are so concerned with Woodrow Wilson and Lenin that the assassination of Russia's Romanoff royal family is often reduced to, literally, a footnote, and the claim of a woman that she is Nicholas II's surviving daughter and it's a surviving daughter and heiress is rarely mentioned at all.

And so one tends to sniff at the story of "Anastasia," both before seeing the Marcella Maurella play and afterwards.

BUT DURING the play---ah! that is another matter, especially when the Farmington Players give it their touch. That is their way. The Farmington Players don't perform with absolute perfection, and yet it isn't enough to say their "Anastasia" is awfully good. There is a feeling, a spark, an extra bit of care that a few persons took---something that reaches out from the Barn stage and pulls one into the 1920 scene and makes one a part of it.

They boast that they did everything possible to have authentic stage settings, but that isn't what makes it spark. They ransacked wardrobes for costumes, and they brought in Basil Marchand, a former Cossack soldier, as dialect consultant, but even that isn't what made the subtle difference.

PERHAPS THE AURA emanates from Hope Nahstoll, the Farmington Players veteran star who plays the haughty, crusty, saber-tongued old dowager empress.

Anna-Anastasia (Ceci Orman) isn't entirely certain who she is in Act I (in which, on opening night she blew her hysteria lines), but in Act II Nahstoll turns her into an excellent performer.

No one---the promoters of the girl's claim, even the girl herself---believes she is really the sole survivor of the 1918 Ekaterinburg massacre, at least during Act I. To claim the czar's Swedish bankrolls, the promoters must win the support of old "Grand-trans." The girl and the old lady finally confront each other in the last half of Act II.

SLOWLY, ALMOST imperceptibly, the issue becomes not whether she will prove she is the czar's heiress, but whether she can make contact with the only other living member of a human family. They do make contact, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

So you can go to the Players' Barn on 12 Mile between Farmington and Orchard Lake roads at 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 9, 10, 11, 16 or 17. You'll doubt that the princess survived before you see the play, and the next day you'll be a doubter again.

But for one incredible hour while you're there, you will be convinced that this frail woman did miraculously survive the fusillade in the basement, and that she has indeed found the only thing she wanted to find---the kindly old lady who had comforted her as a child.

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