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## The Matchmaker



When Mrs. Dolly Levi exclaims that "the future is the most expensive luxury in the world," she was hinting at the possibilities open to all of us, if we have the means to secure them. The means may be as simple as the money possessed by a rich store owner, or as abstract as the sense of adventure engendered by the effect of youthful enthusiasm. Dave Florek's production of Thornton Wilder's "The Matchmaker" is a meditation on the possibilities achieved by those in the know, paying scrupulous attention to the minor roles affected by the match.

When Thornton Wilder's adaptation of Johann Nestroy's German play, "The Merchant of Yonkers," became a failure, he set about expanding the role of a minor character to broaden the interest of the work. That previously fringe character, Dolly Levi (Amanda Carlin), is a marriage broker in desperate need of return fare to New York. She latches onto Horace Vandergelder (James Gleason), a stingy and wealthy merchant of Yonkers who is in search of a wife. Dolly introduces Vandergelder to Mrs. Molloy (Alyss Henderson), a cynical hat seller who ends up harboring Vandergelder's two clerks in her shop. When that falls through, Dolly tries to hook Vandergelder to a so-called Ernestina Simple, a supposed daughter of an undertaker who knows everyone in town. Dolly's true motive being to save Vandergelder for herself, though for no romantic reason but that "money is like manure; it is not worth a thing unless it is spread around, encouraging young things to grow."

One of those young things is Ermengarde (Hannah Florek), Vandergelder's niece, who is thinking of escaping from home with the artist Ambrose Kemper (Ethan Brosowsky). Vandergelder, who has "never heard of a broken heart" opposes the match, and sends his niece instead to the ever depressed Miss Flora Van Huysen (Alison Shanks). Miss Van Huysen hilariously mistakes her own relative Ermengarde for a boy in drag played by Barnaby Tucker (Colin Thomas Jennings), one of Vandergelder's clerks. Despite her patronage of the young lovers, Miss Van Huysen is skeptical of imagination, which she calls "the greatest disappointment of (her) life." At one point, she's so confused with the misidentity that she quips "it doesn't matter who's named what" as long as they're in love.


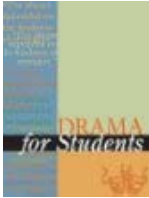

These and many other episodes are given a retro look by Dave Florek and Interact theatre. Florek manages to keep much of Wilder's theatre-as-a-convention consciousness and straight black humor, two characteristics that distinguish the play from its later reincarnation as the Tony-award winning musical "Hello, Dolly!" Florek retains the occasional audience-directed monologues interspersed throughout the play, but made them more relevant by highlighting the perspectives of each of the minor characters who speak.

For example, the recently hired hand Malachi Stack (James Greene) stops to speak to the audience during a major plot twist in the work. He has found a wallet on the ground with hundreds of dollars in it, and decides to return it (wrongfully) to its owner, whom he thinks is Cornelius Hackl (Patrick Rafferty). Cornelius and Barnaby have escaped from Yonkers and the shop of Vandergelder where they work to party in New York. They had first stopped in Mrs. Molloy's hat store, and decided to go to town with Mrs. Molloy and her lovely assistant Minnie Fay (Rona Benson). They decide to go to the fashionable Harmonia Gardens restaurant, because Dolly had earlier hinted that Cornelius is actually a man of the town (he's not). The result is that they have no money to pay the bill. That is, until poor Stack arrives with what turns out to be his boss's wallet. In a mock-dramatic and enormously entertaining aside, Stack explains why he didn't just keep the money. Stack notes that "if a man has no vices, he's in great danger of making vices out of his virtues," and so only from vice does virtue spring up (his example is the "drunkard who is the benefactor of the whole city). Where Stack's personality takes over is his assertion that one must "never take on two vices at the same time," and since he is a drunkard, he cannot take on both whiskey and money. "One vice at a time," he claims, and suddenly, we feel the money-as-manure analogy all over again, for what is good is not the individual good, but the let's-spread-the-wealth-around good.

It's fitting that another minor character gives the final voice to the play. When it's all said and done, Cornelius ends up with Mrs. Molloy after many an adventures, including sitting next door to his boss Vandergelder at the restaurant and hiding in Mrs. Molloy's closet when Vandergelder courts the lady. His buddy Barnaby was told to yell "pudding" when an adventure abounds, and this occurred repeatedly. Their boss Vandergelder never gave them a single day off, and Barnaby always called him "wolftrap." Jennings and Rafferty gave highlight performances of two characters who might be called the centers of the play, even though they're minor characters, for Wilder's work is not about matchmaking or a merchant of Yonkers, but about what you want to do when you "sit quietly at home."

You want to have an adventure. Barnaby and Cornelius and even Mrs. Molloy and Minnie Fay all want to have "pudding," and Dolly wants to give it to them by "spreading it around." Florek's direction makes sure that the adventure we experience are all "spread around" to each individual character by allowing each of them to tell their stories directly to the audience.

"The Matchmaker" is produced by Interact theatre company ([www.interactla.org](http://www.interactla.org)). Adventures continue at the Victory theatre center of Burbank through October 18.

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