

Coach House Production of 'Anastasia' Reaffirms Group's Theatrical Potentials

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A Coach House merry-go-round of frenzied activity in preparation for the opening of its current production "Anastasia" paid off with a shining gold ring last night. First nighters were treated to a mature, polished presentation of this popular, yet difficult, vehicle and there is little doubt tonight's and Saturday's houses will be filled to capacity.

Coach House has done more than just produce a good play, it has presented a fresh public image and reaffirmed its rightful place as a thoroughly competent Little Theatre group deserving of public support.

For this we say "bravo" to a comparatively new director, William Skilling, and the guidance of its president George N. Betts.

That Ulster County has an abundance of talented individuals was re-emphasized last night also. Without a doubt the two top performers are Elizabeth Askue in the title role and Louise Greenwald as the Dowager Empress. Any apprehensions I may have had about the difficulty of the second act, when the Dowager Empress meets the alleged Anastasia, melted into sheer amazement as these two gifted ladies floated through this scene with unequalled professional grace. Mrs. Askue's skill as an actress was evident throughout the evening. She is a credit to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts where she studied. As Anastasia, she wins an audience completely.

Louise Greenwald gives a very realistic performance of the Empress. She has perfected her role down to an authentic Russian accent. Her performance is impressive.

There were other pleasant surprises in this production. These were the able performances turned in by Robert Baron, James Enderlyn and Gerald Griffin Jr. Griffin was particularly convincing as the sophisticated scoundrel Prince Bounine. All these gentlemen are responsible for the smoothness of the opening act. It set the pace for the entire performance.

Jack Marquardt also proved his theatrical talents last night with his interpretation of the part of Prince Paul. I think that Marquardt will develop into a first rate actor. You will enjoy him in Anastasia.

This capable cast is rounded out by Emilia Weyhe, Matthew Duer, James Blanc, Frank Policano, Kathleen Griffin, W. Scott Foster and Helen Hodges.

There are very few weak spots in this production. As a matter of fact, they go almost unnoticed.

Ralph Harper, as always, has done a superb job with the sets. Authenticity has been his byword. In "Anastasia" he has hung a genuine Icon on the wall of the set. It bears the date 1886. The Icon is the property of Christus Larious.

Some of the props used on

stage for this production actually belonged to the famous Mae West, I was told. The items of furniture now belong to Mrs. Weyhe.

Credits also got to Diane Pickering, script coordinator, Delores Crosby, costumes, Mary Becker and George Betts for stage settings.

The play will be repeated tonight and Saturday with curtains at 8:30. I recommend it.