

Review: Clarence Brown's 'On the Razzle' is silly farce

'On the Razzle' ends CBT season on silly note

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Originally published 01:11 p.m., April 27, 2013

Updated 01:20 p.m., April 27, 2013

Every man in the Clarence Brown Theatre's current production "On the Razzle" wants to better himself.

Pompous shop owner Zangler played by Neil Friedman wants other grocers to see him as successful, and he wants to marry Madame Knorr (Laura Sebastian). Part of the reason is that her Viennese dress shop is classier than his rural grocery.

Zangler's clerks Weinberl (David Brian Alley) and Christopher (Cory O'Brien-Pniewski) want promotions. Fortune hunter Sonders (Tramell Tillman) plans to elope with Zangler's niece Marie (Johanna Dunphy.)

It's not certain what the women in the play's 1890s Vienna, Austria, setting want, other than to get married. And for Sebastian's Madame Knorr, to have another glass of champagne.

But deciding "On the Razzle's" deeper meaning is pointless. Searching for it requires digging through layers of frantic fluff, linguistic twists and choreographed foot chases. Shenanigans replace substance in this farce. Sometimes the play is silly. Other times it's overboard silly. But the UT academic year is ending and spring is here so what's better time for some fluff? The cast handles the material well. Some smaller roles add more laughs. Jed Diamond, as the sex-starved coachman, basically steals every Act II scene he's in.

The plot of "On the Razzle" is the story of country yokels who get in trouble as they seek adventure in the big city. As Alley's Weinberl says, "I've got to acquire a past before it's too late." (It's good to see Alley back on stage after he served nine months as Clarence Brown interim managing director.)

After Zangler heads to Vienna Weinberl and Christopher decide to close the shop and go too. But Zangler can't woo Madame Knorr there; he's trying to get Marie away from Sonders. When his clerks spot the boss, they spend as much time hiding from him as they do pretending to be well-to-do men.

Friedman's Zangler gets many of the play's word twists, saying such lines as "Fetch

me a half-witted cab, you hansom fool!” He’s also a straight man for others’ jokes. Wearing a too-small uniform, he asks, “Do you think it should be let out?” “Not until after dark,” deadpans Alley. The timing between the two is excellent in the play’s near Abbott-and-Costello moments. “Shall I go or what?” Friedman’s Zangler asks. “What?” replies Alley’s Weinberl. “No I’ll go,” replies Friedman.

“On the Razzle” plays through May 12. I have two suggestions if you go. First, and particularly if it’s been a long day, have a cup of coffee. You should be alert to follow the multiple puns and quick action. Second, go in a giggly mood. You’ll appreciate more the play’s general madness. As Clarence Brown Producing Artistic Director Calvin MacLean told Friday’s opening night audience, “On the Razzle” is “a profoundly silly show.”



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