

Bunbury Theatre Offers Local Story

SAT FEB 16 2002
IN REVIEW

By ROBERT W. PLYLER

The Bunbury Theatre Company invites the public to be charmed by the courtship letters of a couple who lived and loved in our city, early in the last century.

The production of *if nothing happens...* opened last night, in the company's basement venue.

It is a staging of just a few of the letters exchanged by Norman W. Ingerson of Jamestown and Stella May Murdock of Sparta, Pa., between their meeting at the age of 19 and their marriage several years later.

The letters were published in book form by local historian Paul Leone and by Jennifer Riesmeyer Elvgren, who is the couple's great granddaughter.

The title of the book and the subsequent play comes from

Norman's repeated promises that he will visit Stella or he will attend a friend's wedding or he will report for a new job, "if nothing happens."

Ironically, a great deal happens: presidents are elected, children die, buildings burn down, seasons change.

The play is wonderfully appealing, especially if you know Jamestown and know exactly which streets he is sleighing upon and in which building he has found new employment.

Brody Evans is absolutely beautiful as the charming Stella. She is resplendent in a delicate gown by Lucy Warren, and her

gestures and body English are so graceful, she easily wins the audience's hearts.

She and Matthew J. Kraft, stalwart and handsome as her devoted friend, both read the letters with fine projection and outstanding analysis of the content.

The play is too long, especially because essentially the entire evening, all we see is Ms. Evans seated on our left and Mr. Kraft seated on our right, reading letters.

Len Barry did a fine job, playing far beyond his natural age as Stella's father.

Director Bryan S. Higby's hands were more or less tied by the nature of the play, but he certainly kept the evening natural, believable, and wonderfully accessible.

The simple set by Higby and Kraft worked very well, to demonstrate the cruel distance between the young lovers, while their words and actions conveyed the growing warmth between them.

It's easy to forget in our modern comfort, how hard life was a century ago.

This play portrays it for us, along with the innocence, and the humanity of the period, as well.

Wear a warm sweater and bring a pair of gloves, because the theater is cold, but go, if you can.

if nothing happens... repeats at 8 p.m. tonight and Sunday and Feb. 21 to 23. Performances are in the theater at the corner of Second and Cherry streets in Jamestown.