

# ‘Unnecessary Farce’ at Act II delivers light-hearted laughs, impeccable timing, fabulous cast

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**For Digital First Media**

If you're up for a night of nonsensical plot devices and zany one-liners, Act II Playhouse is the perfect venue for a light-hearted, amusing evening spent with seven no-holds-barred actors and a botched undercover operation. A fabulous cast hits on all cylinders with Paul Slade Smith's "Unnecessary Farce," a fast-moving and expertly crafted comic contraption.

This wildly manic comedy features over-the-top action filled with mix-ups and mayhem that keeps you laughing throughout. Seldom do you see an exquisite, well-executed farce such as this. It is a funny, frantic, chaotic, well-crafted whodunit. The advance publicity did not do it justice, I never expected it to be this funny.

Farce is one of those concepts, like irony, that has been diluted by being invoked too regularly. When we get disgusted with a certain level of incompetence, be it a congressional procedure, or a sporting event, we label it a farce, as a generic synonym for awful.

A true bedroom farce, however, is as painstakingly delicate construction and a sublime example of ridiculous comedy achieved through careful intelligence.

Yes, there are, as a rule, people in their underwear where they shouldn't be, slamming doors, mistaken identities, innuendo, public humiliation, shouting and slapstick. No, this genre of theater rarely wins the Pulitzer Prize for drama. But it sure can be fun.



*Jake Blouch plays Todd and Karen Peakes plays*

*production of "Unnecessary Farce."*  
*Photo by Mark Garvin*

Here, actor Paul Slade Smith has an edge when it comes to writing for actors: like the actor/playwright Molière his characters drive his increasingly frenzied, unrelentingly funny plot.

"Unnecessary Farce" has a simple plot. Two small-town detectives are on a stakeout at a hotel, hoping to catch the mayor admitting corruption to a city accountant.

Romantic escapades, a loopy video camera, a conflicted body guard and a Scottish hitman — renowned for his "death by bagpipes" — all work their way through the twists of simulated sex and slamming doors on the way to a happy ending.

Each of this superb seven-member cast gets moments to shine and they relish their opportunities with great flare.

Anthony Lawton and Karen Peakes are thoroughly entertaining as the bumbling police officers, both exhibiting terrific comic timing throughout the show.

Lawton is a brilliant physical actor whose facial expressions alone can give you the giggles. Peakes gets some great lines as she tries to decipher the Scottish hit-man's dialect. With darting eyes that tell a story in themselves she also gets to play a good bit of physical humor at which she excels.

Susan McKey is in excellent form, mentally and physically, as her character gets deeper into the sting operation especially when she lets her hair down and signals for help using the synchronized "hot and bothered" method. She gets pretty warm under those stage lights which is fortunate for Ms. McKey who spends much of her time flaunting her firm figure and wearing next to nothing.

Tom Teti is the straight man, creating a seemingly dim-witted and unflappable Mayor weekly, inconveniently walking in and out of hilariously compromising situations usually involving McKey's character. Akeem Davis is Agent Frank, an overwhelmed character who habitually misinterprets signals being sent his way.

Jake Blouch's Scottish hit-man provides loads of comedic fodder as he makes his entrance late in the first act and dominates much of the second act action. From his raving about his non-functioning bagpipes to being constantly misunderstood — not to mention his "assassination outfit" — Blouch delivers a winning performance. Gerri Weagraff's character provides the show's biggest plot twist — not to be given away here — and she demonstrates her comic effectiveness as though she were playing two roles.

Director David Bradley has marshaled his cast — all brilliant performers — to make painstakingly synchronized use of every door, closet, and cranny (including the space behind the bed) to conduct their ruses, couplings, escapes, attacks, and "Tallahassee Flips" (something you will enjoy seeing when you get there.) That is when you get to appreciate the work of Fight Director Samantha Bellomo.

"Unnecessary Farce" is that rarest of theatrical birds, a farce that is actually funny. Sure, it's silly to the max, but it makes the audience laugh which is the primary responsibility of a farce and a goal rarely achieved.

There is no profundity here, no social value, no depth of character, and no scintillating dialogue. The show exists to make audiences laugh, not think or shed a tear. Playwright Smith fulfills that mandate with gratifying flair.

unscripted.

**IF YOU GO**

“Unnecessary Farce” continues at the Act II Playhouse, 56 E. Butler Ave. in Ambler through March 22, 2015.

Tickets: \$24 – \$35. Information: 215.654.0200 or [act2.org](http://act2.org)