

ALIVE AND WELL

By Kenny Finkle

Virginia Stage Company

Wells Theatre

For tickets call: 800-982-2787

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

This world premiere is the second work in Virginia Stage Company's American Soil new play series.

Carla Keenen, a free lance journalist from New York, has flown to Norfolk to meet with an ardent Civil War re-enactor by the name of Zachariah Clemenson. We meet them at the Virginia Diner in Wakefield. They are getting set to hit the path on a quest. They are going to the place where Zachariah claims to have encountered The Lonesome Soldier, who is the oldest living Civil War Veteran. The time is the present so he would indeed be up there in years. Zacharia reassures the skeptical writer that the soldier is not only real but alive and well. Guided by a crazy compass, they set out on foot through the heart of Virginia to find him. She will document their findings in an article for an unspecified magazine.

Many funny events take place on the way to the woods inhabited by the old soldier. The humor, at its best, comes from the characters' behavior. We know that Tony Award winner Jarrod Emick is a splendid actor from his stellar performance as Hank Williams a couple of seasons ago. He excels once again as Zachariah. His timing for comedy is impeccable and he knows how to throw away a line to hit pay dirt. Even more significant is his artistry in revealing the many layers of the complex and fascinating Zachariah Clemenson. He quickly lets us know that Zachariah is not your typical workaday red neck. At present, he is suffering from a broken heart after being given the pitch by his current love Regina. His barely concealed emotions erupt in tears at the slightest provocation. He drinks whiskey that he makes himself. He's a sensitive idealist, a dreamer with a passion and love for the land. He holds our interest in every breath of his performance.

Carla Keenen is the antithesis of Zachariah. As played by Jane Pfitsch, she is angry and shrill and can't let her guard down. She is troubled by her love life and her career is at a very low point. She says she is just surviving. She tells Zachariah that he is a night mare. Unfortunately, Pfitsch and one assumes director Chris Hanna, have not explored the reality of this woman beyond her immediate problems. While she certainly has many amusing moments, her performance lacks dimension and variety.

Playwright Kenny Finkle has provided a scenario that is right for comedy and articulates the differences between Southerners and Yankees to a degree. The play moves swiftly and joyously until the end of the first act. The two sojourners have taken shelter from a storm in an abandoned log cabin. This scene seems very long and as performed not much really happens. Carla seems very immature and her fear of the dark is forced and unbelievable.

In Act Two there is a scene in Yogaville, Virginia that seems to come out of nowhere and is not particularly amusing. Finally, the boy meets girl relationship doesn't ring true. They are hardly naïve virgins after all. There's something too coy about their attraction for each other and we don't see it developing along the way. Their behavior is more yesteryear than today. When they do finally kiss, the staging is a bit artsy and precious.

Jo Winiarski's set functions efficiently as does the lighting by A. Nelson Ruger IV. The set has lots of funeral type grass that is messy and distracting. .

There is without a doubt an entertaining comedy in these off the wall situations. At present, it is not fully brought to life but the potential is there.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.