



Review: ‘The Nerd’ at Bucks County Playhouse

by Neal Newman on June 26, 2017



The summer stock experience has nearly passed away. Half a century ago it was a vacation custom to visit a picturesque village and, after a day of sightseeing complemented by great food, stop by a local playhouse for a fun evening. These theaters sometimes featured young artists practicing their new craft or famous stars in package tours of old favorites. Changing tastes and financial realities have ended many of these summer theaters, but a taste of that bygone era remains at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, Pa. This converted mill, which still has a waterfall next to the front door, features a charming and relaxed patio, pre-show musical offerings and an excellent performance of Larry Shue’s *The Nerd*.



Gavin Lee, Joe Kinosian, Grant Shaud, and Zuzanna Szadkowski. Photo by Mark Garvin.

This is the sort of play (think *Butterflies Are Free* or Shue’s *The Foreigner*) that summer stock thrived on. It’s funny, offers actors fine roles, and even a little food for thought. The wonderful Equity cast features many favorites recognizable from film and television roles.

You know *The Nerd* is an actor's dream when you peruse the character list, all possessing hilarious names. There's Willum (Kyle Cameron), a shy young architect who is more a wimp than a nerd. Everyone can relate to Willum's commitment phobia and fear of asserting himself. His second act speech about people not being able to get along gets classic treatment from Cameron. Willum is in love with Tansy (Clea Alsip), who is fond of him but knows he "lacks gumption." She is about to achieve the lifelong dream of becoming a TV weather girl, which will probably end the relationship. Willum's other friend is Axel (Gavin Lee), who offers acerbic, jocose comments on the events. Unsurprisingly, such a fellow is a drama critic, the kind who writes his mean-spirited reviews prior to seeing the play. Willum's haughty boss Warnock Waldgrave (Grant Shaud) shows up with his family Clelia (Zuzanna Szadkowski), a teacher who specializes in "sloooooow lerrrrrners", and their terrifying son Thor (Avey Noble), referred to as "the poster boy for Planned Parenthood."



Grant Shaud, Zuzanna Szadkowski, Gavin Lee, Clea Alsip, Joe Kinosian, and Kyle Cameron. Photo by Mark Garvin.

Just bringing these absurd folk together would make an amusing evening, but we soon encounter the only character with a realistic-sounding name, Rick Steadman, whom Willum has been hoping to meet since Steadman saved his life years ago in the war. Steadman turns up, dressed as The Fly (don't ask), and turns out to be a human being totally lacking social ability. He is absolutely unaware of his effect on people around him, and immediately becomes the insufferable bore who plans to stay forever and ever. He even looks like a nerd – he has the standard shirt pocket penholders, pink pants (excellent costumes by Annie Simon), and a physicality that seems to be made of balloons and rubber bands. His idea of artistic expression is

learning to play “The Star Spangled Banner” on the tambourine. Shrewdly played by Joe Kinosian (the co-creator of the Off Broadway hit *Murder for Two*), Rick flings himself into absurd postures on the furniture, uttering irksome platitudes, until the second act, when the friends plot to have the guilt-ridden Willum throw Rick out of his house.

Directed at a lightning pace by Marc Vietor, the comedy speeds to a hilarious and surprisingly complex finale. TV sitcoms supply premium training for this sort of play, and the cast works the audience with superlative skill.

The Nerd is not only funny but asks questions about the difficulty of human relationships. Every character has difficulties relating, including the boss and his wife who boisterously argue about differing parenting practices (“treat him like an adult!”). Like it or not, being alive with other people is a tricky business.

Thom Weaver contributes perfect comedy-bright lighting, while Maruti Evans’ set has lots of wit and invention. The living room is not only based on an architect’s blueprints, it *looks* like blueprints – complete with handwritten adjustments, and also features a blueprint front curtain and background cyclorama.

When you see *The Nerd*, be certain to make a day of it, to enjoy the complete New Hope Experience.

Running Time: Two hours, with an intermission.



Joe Kinosian and Kyle Cameron. Photo by Mark Garvin.

The Nerd plays through July 15, 2017 at the Bucks County Playhouse – 70 South Main Street, in New Hope, PA. For tickets, call the box office at (215) 862-2121, or purchase them [online](#).