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## STAGE REVIEW: 'The Nerd' at Bucks County Playhouse



By Anthony Stoeckert

Joe Kinosian must be having an awful lot of fun playing the title character in "The Nerd" at the Bucks County Playhouse. He's a blast right from the start, as he enters the proceedings in a crazy Halloween costume with a head resembling a fly's. Soon he's on the floor, asking a fellow party guest to help him take his pants off, insulting food he's served, throwing deviled eggs all over the place, and annoying people he's just met by leading them through a complicated game that involves everyone putting paper bags over their heads.

And that's just the start of the antics from the character Rick Steadman in Larry Shue's "The Nerd," running in New Hope, Pennsylvania, through July 15. This is a perfect comedy for the summer, filled with big laughs, a little bit of heart and a clever twist.

Kinosian's character may be the attention-grabber, but this entire cast is terrific, all the actors are very funny.

Set in 1979, "The Nerd," which was first produced in the early '80s, centers around Willum Cubbert (played by Kyle Cameron), an architect who's building a hotel for the wealthy businessman Warnock Waldgrave (Grant Shaud). Willum is stressed out because of the project — it's his ticket out of designing run-of-the-mill housing communities — but Waldgrave is chipping away at his creativity. Willum is also dealing with his non-relationship with his friend Tansy (Clea Alsip). He's interested, and she isn't totally opposed to the idea but has plans to leave Terra Haute, Indiana for a job in Washington D.C.

As the play opens Tansy and another friend, Axel (played by Gavin Lee), are in Willum's apartment, planning his birthday party. Joining them are Warnock, his wife Clelia (Zuzanna Szadkowski) and their young son Thor (Avey Noble).

This party doesn't seem like a blast. Many of the play's early laughs come from Lee as Axel: When Tansy says she isn't ready to date Willum because she's "fresh" out of a relationship, Axel notes that her relationship ended two years ago: "I'll remember never to send you out for seafood."

Noble also gets big laughs early on as the bratty Thor, who storms into the party, toy light saber in hand, and locks himself in the bathroom. Willum asks if there's anything he can do, "You get the mortar, I'll get the bricks," Axel jabs.

Clelia, a '70s new-age kind of parent, tells her husband to reason with their son, so he offers the kid \$30 to get out of the bathroom but the kid demands \$50. "You little bloodsucker, I'll see you in hell first," Warnock shouts, before telling the kid he'll deal with him later, "You're a big, fat disappointment to me, I hope you know that!"

Shaud will be familiar to audiences for his role on the '90s sitcom "Murphy Brown." Recently he was on Broadway in "Relatively Speaking" and last year had a role in "Out in the City" at Passage Theatre in Trenton. He brings a helpless sort of bluster to the short-tempered, but always bargaining Waldgrave.

Szadkowski was a regular on "Gossip Girl," and Lee is a Tony-nominee whose Broadway credits include "Les Miserables" and "Mary Poppins." Cameron has performed in New York and around the country, and Alsip will be familiar to audiences who saw her in "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike" at Bucks a few years ago. She's also set to appear in the upcoming Broadway production of "M. Butterfly." The two women have a terrific scene together where Clelia asks if she can break some dishes as her son is locked in the bathroom. It's a form of therapy that seems to do wonders, so Tansy gives a try in an attempt to stay civil while dealing with Rick.

The party may be lame but it, and Willum's life, are about to get worse. Rick saved Willum's life in Vietnam. Willum was a draftsman, safest job in the army, but within 48 hours of arriving in Vietnam, found himself in a rice field in his dress uniform, shot, sitting in mud. He woke up in a hospital in Japan, and was told his life was saved by Rick Steadman. They never met, but they have written to each other, and Willum told Rick that as long as Willum is alive, Rick will always have someone on this planet who will do anything for him.

Easier said than done. Rick arrives from Wisconsin. He works in a chalk factory, as an inspector, making sure there's chalk in the boxes. Rick's brother was "generous" enough to give Rick all of his money and credit cards so that he could go on a long trip. And Rick isn't just here for the party, he invites himself to stay with Willum for a long time, sleeping on the couch, following him everywhere, and even deciding to

join him in the architecture business. The Nerd has no training as an architect, but he added a chimney to a rendering of Willum's and thinks he has a knack for it.

Kinosian is returning to Bucks, having performed in the holiday version of "Murder For Two" (which he co-wrote) there last year. His performance is top-notch as virtually every move his character makes is annoying to the characters, while still bringing humanity to the Nerd. Willum is the most sympathetic character, and in Cameron's hands, you feel Willum's pain.

The production does a good job of capturing the play's late-'70s setting without going overboard or making it jokey. The set by Maruit Evans consists of Willum's apartment with denim-colored furniture. In a clever move, the walls look like blueprints.

Costume designer Annie Simon has done a terrific job with the outfits, which include plaid pants, wide ties, a green polo-type shirt with stripes in the middle and a white color and, best of all, a powder-blue tuxedo worn by Axel.

*"The Nerd" continues at the Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main St., New Hope, Pennsylvania, through July 15. For tickets and information, go to [bcptheater.org](http://bcptheater.org) or call 215-862-2121.*