2008

The Old Folks' Home

Mark Bell

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Reviewer: Mark Bell  
Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult  
Rating: Significant shortcomings  
Genre: Contemporary; Plays; Humorous; Holiday;  
Subject: Love; Senior citizens; Happiness; Drama--Reviews;  
Theme: Growing old does not cause someone to lose their personality, feelings, or humor.  
Production Requirements: One set is needed. Simple costumes and few props keep productions cost low. Acts: 1 or 2 with a possible intermission  
Run Time: 20–30 min  
Characters: ~21  
Cast: Five males and sixteen females; some roles can be swapped.  
Time Period: Contemporary

*The Old Folks' Home* is a comedy about the lives of retirement home residents. There are three main groups: the checkers players, the exercise group, and the bingo group. The main characters are Grandma and Larry. Larry is a forgetful, crotchery old man, while Grandma is a belligerent old woman, who uses her cane and other objects as bludgeons. In the play, these two characters leave their respective groups and talk about how lonely they are at the home. By the end of the play, they reveal to the audience that they both want to spend time with someone special.

*The Old Folk's Home* is a short parody that focuses on the stereotypes and emotions of senior citizens. Harden makes his characters a bit ridiculous to help create such solid stereotypes as a “grouchy old man.” Even though the characters are senior citizens, Harden wrote the play for children to be cast in all the roles. With some of the dialogue and acting, senior citizens could be offended if the stage director and actors are not careful in portraying the characters. Because the play is so short, many characters are flat stereotypes. Even thought the play is focused on the exaggerated and silly characters of the retirement home, there are some tender moments that can be appreciated. The theme of continuing to have fun throughout life is evident throughout the piece, with people giggling about crushes or holding hands. The final moments of the piece are somewhat didactic.

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