



Outpost in the Burbs

Top 10 for NJ Theater in 2015

By: JAY LUSTIG

Sorry, but I couldn't narrow it down to 10. I saw about 45 plays in New Jersey this year, and looking over my reviews, I felt 12 of them deserved a mention in my year-end best-of list.

So here they are, in alphabetical order.

"Ken Ludwig's *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*," McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton. This Holmes doesn't scowl. Or, if he does, it's only for comic effect, with a mischievous laugh soon to follow. This new play reinterprets the famous Holmes novel, "*The Hound of the Baskervilles*," as a breezy romp, with many quick costume changes from three of the five cast members (those not playing Holmes and Watson) and inventive, surprise-filled staging.

"*Be More Chill*," Two River Theater, Red Bank. An effervescent, feel-good musical about a teen who stumbles on a pill that he thinks will solve all his problems.

"*Buyer & Cellar*," George Street Playhouse, New Brunswick. John Tartaglia gave one of the performances of the year in this sharp-edged comedy about a man hired to work in Barbra Streisand's basement.

"*A Comedy of Tenors*" at McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton. Ken Ludwig follows up his popular 1986 comedy, "*Lend Me a Tenor*" with an equally entertaining one, set two years later, with the same characters, in Paris.

"*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*," Two River Theater, Red Bank. Presenting "*Forum*" with an all-male cast made it seem even more ridiculous than usual. And with "*Forum*," the more ridiculousness, the better.

"*Love's Labour's Lost*," Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's outdoor stage at the College of St. Elizabeth in Morris Township. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey brought an appropriately light touch to the over-the-top silliness of one of The Bard's frothiest concoctions.

“The Nether,” Centenary Stage Company, Hackettstown. A powerful nightmare of a play, exploring morality — or the lack, thereof — in the virtual world.

“Repairing a Nation,” Crossroads Theatre Company, New Brunswick. Nikkole Salter’s gripping new drama delves into the lingering power of a family’s, and a community’s, past.

“The Seedbed,” New Jersey Repertory Company, Long Branch. A tension-filled tale of an Irish family in crisis, with some startling revelations along the way.

“Tar Beach,” Luna Stage, West Orange. A shy, sensitive teenager and her working class Queens, N.Y. family struggle to make it through the chaotic “Summer of Sam.”

“Trying,” Cape May Stage. An absorbing two-person play, with Howard Green and Allison Plamondon giving utterly convincing performances as an irascible ex-Attorney General and his new secretary.

“Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike,” Paper Mill Playhouse, Millburn. The Paper Mill presented a lot of big musicals this year, but for pure enjoyment, you couldn’t beat this non-musical — a first class production of Christopher Durang’s hilarious 2012 comedy.