

[Arsenic and Old Lace Lacks Energy](#)

Arsenic and Old Lace is one of the most popularly produced plays in the United States. Since its premiere in 1939, it continues to be revived on stages from Broadway to Main Street. The play revolves around the Brewster family of Brooklyn. Mortimer Brewster is the hero of this farcical black comedy. He has to deal with not only his murderous family, but the local police, his wanted brother and his new fiancée. You can currently see the old faithful at The Granite Theatre in Westerly. But beware: The normally charming and engaging actors of the Granite Theatre seem bored with this script.

A black comedy needs a sense of urgency, which is completely lacking from Granite Theatre's production. The actors speak so slowly, it's difficult for an audience member to buy into the scripted dialog being a real conversation. The characters meander across the stage, which should only be acceptable from the two shuffling spinster aunts. Mortimer, played by John Cillino, shows very little surprise or shock at the discovery that those aunts are murderers.

Each of the characters in *Arsenic and Old Lace* have some sort of eccentricity. Mortimer is a marriage-opposing theater critic who hates theater. Abby and Martha Brewster (Beth Jepson and Christine Reynolds) are do-gooders who see their murders as charity work. Teddy (Fergus Milton) thinks he's President Theodore Roosevelt. Jonathan (Jude Pescatello) is a murderer who has undergone plastic surgery to change his face. Pescatello plays into the "Boris Karloff" look of his character by contorting his face for the entirety of his time on stage, and holding his body in an uncomfortably clenched stance. He is the only actor making an attempt to showcase the craziness of his character; however, the effort it took to hold his body in that way slowed down his pace and made him a decidedly un-scary presence on stage.

While it works for Aunts Abby and Martha to be calm since they see their killings as a charity, Jepson and Reynolds seem to barely react to anything around them. If there is no surprise for the actors on stage, there is no surprise for the audience.

The most humorous character, by far, is Teddy Brewster as he assigns everyone in the house roles based on Roosevelt's biography. Milton, however, doesn't fully commit to his character. He is not quite as commanding or as loud as he should be. He often yells, "Charge!" before storming up the set stairs, but I kept wishing he'd really throw his body into it, get red-faced while yelling. For the pace of this production, he is high energy. For the pace the production needs to work, however, Milton needs twice the energy.

The actors also show no real connection between each other. Mortimer and Elaine (John Cillino and Ann Westendorf) are in love and get engaged early in the play. The interactions between the two convey no love, not even good old-fashioned lust. Their interactions are stiff. When the two do touch, it seems like they'd rather be doing anything else. They become awkward and hard to watch.

Unfortunately, this production needs an injection of caffeine. As Mortimer would say, this production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* is "tedious and uninspired."

Arsenic and Old Lace runs through Oct 8 at the Granite Theatre in Westerly. You can purchase tickets by calling the box office at 401-596-2341.