

“Harvey” a sight to behold for Succop Theater audience

Lead BC3 actor sees way to convince crowd of invisible rabbit

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The Pioneer Players, Butler County Community College’s theater group, will perform Mary Chase’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play “Harvey” from April 26-28 at Succop Theater on BC3’s main campus. Among members of the cast are, from left, Tyler Pollock, who portrays Elwood P. Dowd; Meghan Hyatt as Veta Louise Simmons; Lucas Franklin as Dr. Sanderson; Victoria Allen as Betty Chumley; Wolfgang Gaiser as Dr. Chumley; and Adam Seybert as Wilson.

(Butler, PA) Tyler Pollock recites his lines while casting oblique glances into the full-length mirror behind his double-basin countertop, his blue eyes reflecting to the red pupils, or tracing the gestures, of something only he can see.

An hour a night, three nights a week for the past five weeks, the Butler County Community College communications major and lead actor in the Pioneer Players’ production of “Harvey” has commandeered, and videotaped his mirrored body language in, the second-floor bathroom of his foursquare home in Chicora.

The blue and white restroom has transformed into a rehearsal studio for a role he describes as his most ambitious – convincing Succop Theater audience members they are testifying to that which they cannot witness:

A 6-foot, 1½-inch tall, dapperly dressed white rabbit named “Harvey” – the pooka with whom Pollock has been contemplating conversations since earning the role of Elwood P. Dowd in November.

The Pioneer Players, BC3’s theater group, will perform Mary Chase’s Pulitzer Prize-winning 1944 play, one immortalized by Jimmy Stewart in the 1950 film of the same name, from April 26-28.

Show times are 7:30 p.m. April 26 and 27; and 2 p.m. April 28.

“Not an easy part to do”

Pollock’s challenge in portraying Dowd, a talkative sociable outcast, is maintaining eye contact with the good-spirited rabbit invisible to the audience – and who when standing is 4½ inches taller than the 21-year-old Karns City High graduate.

“I am looking up at Harvey,” Pollock said, “and it feels so awkward to do. Just looking up and there is no one else there. That is the hardest part.”

Pollock reflected on a method to make his third appearance with BC3’s Pioneer Players – which includes supporting roles as George Gibbs in Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town” in fall 2017 and as Tom in David Lassig’s “Barely Heirs” in spring 2017 – more credible, and selected the mirrored powder room approach.

“I sit in my bathroom,” he said. “There is a big mirror. I set my phone against the wall or on a chair and I record the mirror. And then go back and watch it.”

Persuading Succop Theater visitors that Pollock is conversing and interacting with Harvey, said Larry Stock, director of BC3’s Cultural Center and director of the drama-comedy, “is very crucial.

“Not an easy part to do,” Stock said. “Tyler has to talk to a rabbit that is not there. A lot of time Tyler asks Harvey questions. Tyler pulls out a chair for Harvey to sit down. Tyler has to acknowledge that Harvey is there.

“But there is nobody there. Tyler sees him, but nobody else does.”

Lead actor must consider “blockings”

His character, Elwood, often brings Harvey home for all of his sister Veta’s social gatherings, much to her dismay. In an effort to save the reputations of her daughter, Myrtle Mae, and the rest of the family, Veta commits Elwood to a sanitarium.

As Veta attempts to explain the difficulty of living with Elwood’s eccentricities to the doctors, a comedy of errors ensue that result in Veta’s own committal to the sanitarium. Once the mistake is realized by Dr. Sanderson and Dr. Chumley, the search for Elwood and his invisible friend is afoot.

Pollock’s fellow cast members have seen Pollock’s vision of his role soar in the past five weeks.

“It was difficult during the beginning because Harvey is supposed to be 6-foot, 1½ inches tall,” said Meghan Hyatt, 19, a Butler High graduate who portrays Veta. “So anytime they said, ‘Fix his bow tie,’ Tyler was always looking at the ground. And he always kicked himself. He would say, ‘Oh, Harvey is not on the ground.’ So he always had to remind himself that Harvey was above him.

“Tyler is now very aware that Harvey is above him. He has to keep looking up. It is almost like Harvey is there. It is really amazing how he is able to picture a giant rabbit next to him while he is acting and you can really see that.”

Lucas Franklin, 19, a Freeport High graduate, portrays Dr. Sanderson in the 2½-hour, three-act play that includes two 10-minute intermissions.

“Tyler is doing very well in terms of remembering where Harvey is supposed to be,” Franklin said. “Harvey is invisible. No one is ever playing him. So Tyler has to basically memorize his own blocking, where he goes and where he stands, as well as the blocking of this invisible rabbit.”

A talent, Hyatt said, that is critical to maintain the audience’s own gaze toward something that is not there.

“That is the most important part of the play,” she said. “If the audience doesn’t believe that there is actually an imaginary rabbit that Tyler sees, it loses the entire effect.”

“From the beginning to the end of the show,” Stock added. “It is difficult.”

Unlike anything the audience has seen

Pollock said he must “sell the fact” that Harvey is present – through his playing rock-scissors-paper with his imaginary friend, following Harvey’s gait across the stage and stepping aside so the rabbit can take a seat – “or the audience is going to be lost and they are not going to understand the whole concept.

“There are actually a couple of parts at the end of the show where the door will open and close,” Pollock said. “And I have to really pretend that Harvey walked through that door. If they just see a door opening and closing, and I have already led them to believe that the rabbit is not there, they are going to see that door open and say, ‘What the heck?’”

His own bathroom door will be closed an hour a night, three nights a week through April 25 as he videotapes his conversations with that which only he can see.

“I am excited to reach out to the audience as I talk to an imaginary rabbit the entire show,” Pollock said. “I have a lot of paragraph lines where it is just me talking to Harvey, and I am very excited because I don’t think the audience has ever seen anything like it.”

The remainder of the cast includes Gabrielle Lisella portraying Myrtle Mae Simmons; Alyssa Martin as Ethel Chauvenet; Mackenzie Elmer as Nurse Kelly; Adam Seybert as Wilson; Wolfgang Gaiser as Dr. Chumley; Victoria Allen as Betty Chumley; Jacob Hetrick as Judge Gaffney; Samantha Tanner as Ms. Johnson; and Shawn Covington as E.J. Lofgren.

Gabrielle Barton is the student director.

Tickets cost \$5 for students and \$8 for general admission, and can be purchased by calling the Succop Theater Box Office at 724-284-8505 or by visiting www.bc3.edu/succop-theater.