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Dragon Productions' 'Bees' a hive full of talent

By Keith Kreitman, CONTRIBUTOR

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ONE OF the first things I learned as an insurance and criminal investigator is that it's almost impossible to successfully prosecute a con artist, because the victims are most often complicit in their own fleeing.

In Chicago, at that time, a 75-year-old man we'll call Sam was arrested for having eight wives — at the same time. The town was flabbergasted when the eight rich widows he had fleeced banded together to save him from Uncle Sam's justice because he had poured so much honey over their lonely lives.

That is very much the underlying theme in Dragon Productions' staging of "As Bees in Honey Drown." This is the story of a new writing talent, Elan Wailer (Code Smith), who comes to New York upon the publication of his book and becomes the writing protege of Alexa Vere de Vere (Diahanna Davidson). Vere de Vere is a sophisticated habitue of the world of Manhattan glitter, who needs a screenplay written about her life.

This is a heady world, a mix of genuine celebrities and the phonies posing as such. It is a world in which the unscrupulous seduce ambitious girls on to the casting couch and con artists take financial advantage of dentists, doctors and others who have the money and would like to romanticize their boring lives in show business."

So, how could one expect a neophyte such as Elan to be able to tell the difference? After winging through the swinging world with beautiful and exotic Alexa, he even ends up falling in love with her.

Others — Michael Sally, Kevin Copps, Cristy Lollis and Anne Ho — perform multiple roles representing other Manhattan figures who have been woven into Alexa's world.

This is another example of how in a small theater space, if you have the talent, you may get away with movable boxes and the imagination of the audience for the stage settings.

And this production certainly has the talents: Diahanna Davidson handles the heaviest role, that of the sophisticated Alexa, from the time she was a raw and middle-class girl who migrated into Lower Manhattan from Pennsylvania with a striving artist Mike (Kevin Copps).

Davidson is an extraordinary, multi-faceted actress who dominates the stage, and I cannot imagine the role being performed better by anyone.

As her companion from Pennsylvania, Kevin Copps is excellent, carrying his worldly weariness in his posture and conversational tone.

Michael Sally is one of those deceptive actors who comes up with amazing characterizations. If he makes no physical onstage movements at all, the variety of his facial expressions are a performing platform in themselves.

Code Smith is perfectly cast as a clean-cut and trusting Candide type, who begins to learn that, in the world of real and phony celebrity, appearances are often only a facade covering the truth and in the second act he sets on a quest to pierce that facade to find the truth behind it.

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