

## Northern Stage's "Wife" runs through Sunday

by Aaron Nobel

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION—It's not your grandmother's one-man show. Unless your grandmother's a man.

But Northern Stage's production of "I Am My Own Wife" drew a standing ovation from a packed house Sunday filled largely with grandparent-aged theatergoers—and its merit as an exploration of society, psyche and history grew more evident with each passing minute.

The acclaimed drama recounts playwright Doug Wright's real-life discovery and study of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a homosexual East German museum-curating transvestite senior citizen who somehow survived the rule of Nazis and Communists despite "her" conspicuous idiosyncrasies.

Wright, a gay man curious about gay history, sees Charlotte as a hero, a miracle of survival, and a potential inspiration to many if he can learn enough to tell her story through his craft, theater. But Wright's faith in his project and its subject are tested when parts of Charlotte's story don't add up, and there's question whether "she" survived oppression by cooperating with the oppressors to help them implicate and capture "her" peers.

While it could seem that Wright struggled with distilling his experience into a play (which he did) and thus went with the I'll-make-the-play-about-the-experience-of-making-the-play-and-couch-the-copout-by-making-it-a-one-actor-show route, in the end it seems he arrived at the right vehicle, sometimes distracting but mostly compelling.

Kevin Loreque stars in a black dress and pearls as Charlotte (and 35 other characters, including Wright). Loreque was last seen as the Emcee in last year's "Cabaret," and he again wields a thick German accent with ease.

He seamlessly switches from Charlotte's sing-songy high-pitched delivery to Wright's powerful Texan baritone to the fearsome fury of SS officers and Stasi agents.

With the exception of a hand-to-chest gesture that seemed to span characters, Loreque's transitions are convincing, powerful, instantaneous, and amazingly rapid and numerous. He commands the stage for two hours without so much as a hiccup.

It takes the audience a few minutes to adjust after Loreque appears in his dress and head scarf, eyes sparkling as Charlotte holds and meticulously describes a gorgeous phonograph, one of inventor Thomas Edison's early canister-playing models, among the

many treasures of Charlotte's home/museum. But as the story develops, so does the audience's interest, moving beyond curiosity into absorption and analysis.

Among many accolades, "I Am My Own Wife" won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It runs through Sunday at the Briggs Opera House in downtown White River Junction.