

“I Am My Own Wife” is Masterpiece by Charlie McMeekin

Charlotte von Mahlsdorf is not a name students of history recognize, and never will be. But by the final line of Northern Stage’s production of “I Am My Own Wife,” you are gently but firmly reminded that all human life contains moments of transcendence which must be viewed through the veils of simply being human, real, and desiring simple happiness.

Charlotte explains it herself while putting away the museum pieces she is displaying to playwright Doug Wright, who asks her if she ever fixes broken pieces or paints scratched furniture. “No!” she exclaims. “It is a record of life, a recording of living.”

If you’ve read this far, you deserve to learn more about this unusual and exciting production. The lead actor is Kevin Loreque, who earned praise from me for his portrayal of the emcee in “Cabaret.” Of the 35 people who appear in the production, Loreque is by far the best. Actually, he’s the only . . . as he portrays all of the characters of both sexes, all ages, and at least three continents with finesse and an accuracy that was truly uncanny.

Throughout the evening, I had to remind myself that I was watching just one man, and the three of us in our party agreed that this one man portrayed women as well, perhaps better, than the men he brought to life. His Charlotte is simply delightful, able to be saucy and bemused, forceful and demure.

Playwright Doug Wright visited Charlotte on numerous occasions, taping each interview, and found himself totally stymied by the breadth of material and the contradictions it contained. For instance, rumors persisted that Charlotte survived in part by working as informant for the Stasi. Wright’s breakthrough came when a fellow writer told him simply to “write about your love affair with Charlotte von Mahlsdorf.” The resulting script won him a Pulitzer Prize, and gives us a richly textured evening.

Its only shortcoming as a script is that it seemed to come to an ending on three separate occasions, but it didn't seem to bother the Pulitzer people!

In an age which tends to define things as good or bad, black or white, this production is proudly gray, proudly gay, and gently encourages us to find the nobility in each life, not in its whole, but in its separate moments. I am richer as a person for having gone to see this show.