

# Clague Playhouse invites theatergoers to 'See Rock City'

## *Theater Review*

By Art Thomas

If you are old enough to remember the barns on roadsides, before interstate highways, that proclaimed "See Rock City," then you are old enough to completely enjoy the play by the same name, "See Rock City." It is currently on stage at Clague Playhouse. The play is part of a trilogy, written by Arlene Hutton. It explores relationships and events in the lives of two intertwined eastern Kentucky families.

The starting point of "See Rock City" is an ill fated trip by Raleigh and May to see the American landmark where, on a clear day, one can see seven states. A train in the wrong direction takes them instead to Cincinnati. Not wishing to disappoint Raleigh's eccentric, bombastic mother, they purchase a bird house in Cincinnati and convince the creator to paint the appropriate wording on the roof.

"See Rock City" is a well written play. It is unusual in that nothing happens in the play. There are some events, but they are all off-stage. Instead, playwright Hutton has created characters that engage the audience. Directed by Rob Gibb, the Clague Playhouse production boasts strong performances that give energy to the script.

We are in the middle of World War II. It's 1944 and Raleigh and May are living with May's parents. 'Mr. Gill' is talked of constantly, but never appears. Mrs. Gill, is an amiable mother, and mother-in-law. Perhaps she welcomes Raleigh because her own son is fighting in the war. May is a no-nonsense school principal, perhaps promoted because of the shortage of men, due to the war.

In "See Rock City" people bake and cook - always offstage - and engage in dialogue. But the combina-

tion of captivating dialogue and a good cast carry off the feat with energy.

Jeff Bartholomew tackles the role of Raleigh with a straightforward energy. Given to seizures, Raleigh cannot drive a car or operate dangerous machinery, but he does make contributions of short stories to magazines. Kristen Levy, his conflicted bride, attempts to balance satisfaction in her own life with family obligations to her husband and parents. Levy has the most complex role in the production and has internalized the role so thoroughly that her conflicted feelings come out with clarity and even strength.

As the "mothers," Paige Reich is the long suffering Mrs. Gill. She becomes, in a way, the moral center of the play. Erin Bunting as Raleigh's mom has the more outwardly theatrical role, and captures the most laughs in the script's 95 minute performance time.

Under the capable direction of Rob Gibb, "See Rock City" explores some intriguing themes. The stresses of young newlyweds living in the home of parents could be relevant in almost any decade. "See Rock City" also dabbles in some non-standard themes. The contrast of a national elation as World War II came to an end, is contrasted with the loss of jobs that many women suffered as "our boys" came back from a war and looking for employment. This and other themes are brilliantly explored in the play's second last scene - when the cast are at their best. A family who lose a relative just at the war's end is especially moving as a theme.

"See Rock City" runs through Feb. 5 at Clague Playhouse. I saw a preview performance through the courtesy of Rob Gibb. Some lengthy breaks between acts should be tightened up after a week of performances. You'll get to know six interesting characters, and maybe become hooked enough to wait to see the third part of the trilogy later.