

Ivan Dinh in The Nerd

Judith van Praag

Ivan Dinh has returned to the stage!

After a hiatus of five years, during which he worked on independent movies and videos, such as "Simply FOBulous", "Black Sheep of Chinatown", "Going Straight", and "What You're Leading Me To?"; the actor, who in the past appeared as "Shifty" in the Repertory Actors Theatre's "Miss Minidoka 1943"; as Jed in "Fifth of July" at Northwest Asian American Theater; as Daniel in "A Language of Their Own" at The Group; and as the Prince in "R&H's Cinderella" at Valley Community Players, now will perform the role of Axel Hammond in *The Nerd*, by Larry Shue. The Seattle Performing Arts Fellowship (SPAF), a nonprofit community theatre in Des Moines, Washington presents the play this time.

Larry Shue, a promising actor and playwright, had his career cut short at the age of 39 by the crash of a commuter plane on September 23, 1985. He left behind a small number of published stage plays, among which are two full-length crowd-pleasing, goofy comedies that are a staple of community theatre repertory: "The Foreigner" and "The Nerd".

Back in 1981, the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre was the first to present *The Nerd*, with Shue in the role of the architect. The Royal Exchange Theatre Company in Manchester, England, subsequently produced the play in April of 1982, followed by a very successful West End production. A 1987 Broadway production, directed by Charles Nelson Reilly, is recorded in the Internet Theatre Database.

In *The Nerd*, Willum Cubbert, an architect in Terre Haute, Indiana, has often told his friend Axel Hammond about Rick Steadman, a fellow ex-GI whom he never met, but who saved his life after he was seriously wounded in Vietnam.

Willum has written to Rick that, as long as he is alive, "you will have somebody on earth who will do anything for you".

When Rick shows up unexpectedly at Willum's apartment on the night of Willum's 34th birthday party, his delight soon fades as it becomes apparent that Rick is a hopeless "nerd", who lacks social graces and tact.

As Rick stays on and on, his presence leads to one uproarious incident after another, until he drives even normally placid Willum to contemplating violence. Luckily, a surprising "twist" allows for a happy ending of the play.

Dinh is very excited about playing a part in this hilarious play.

"My dream is to someday play a major role in a Spielberg or Cameron film, but I missed acting on stage, and Axel Hammond is a smart, cynical, and sarcastic jokester," he says. "He's also a good friend who's willing to go far to do someone a favor. I find the character very funny and witty. I'm very happy to play him."

Dinh also considers himself lucky to be working under the direction of SPAF's Lewis Curtiss, whom he doesn't just consider a good director, but also a wonderful human being.

"I find him very inspiring, and I'm grateful to him for taking a chance on me," Dinh says.

SPAF is an outspoken Christian company, presented on its web site (www.spaftheatre.org) as: "the positive alternative to the average and the unacceptable, to the world of secular theatre, where cutting edge and shock are often more welcome than good, clean, family entertainment."

This doesn't mean that the company completely banishes good plays, such as *The Nerd*, in which the occasional "Goddamn" is uttered, from its repertory.

"When we did our first read-through, we made a few adjustments to the script. We don't use 'Goddamn' or 'Jesus'. We replaced such references with 'Oh, brother', or just removed it entirely. We took that approach with obvious references and innuendo, too. Basically, SPAF wants to put on a fun, family oriented show, and that's exactly what we're going to give to our audience."

So there you go. For a cleaned up, fun filled version of "The Nerd", get yourself and the family to Des Moines.

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