

# Northumberland Echo

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## The picture of entertainment

*The Westmoreland Players Theatre opens their production of "I Am a Camera."*

By Travis I. Sivart

Nothing compares to an evening at the theatre, and attending the opening night gala of John Van Druten's "I Am a Camera" at the Westmoreland Players Theatre in Callao was no exception. From the helpful staff at the box office, to the wonderful hors d'oeuvres catered by Chef Dan and Chef Sean, to mingling with other theatre buffs, the evening opened with a delightful atmosphere that accommodated the eager crowd. Some of the gathering wore finery or ties and jackets, or dresses and heels, and others appeared in shorts and sneakers. They milled about discussing previous plays, as well as mundane things like donuts.

Glenn Evans came out to speak with me before the production, greeting me warmly. When I asked about the choice of this play he said that it had been on his and Joy's, his wife, list for a long time because it has comedy, drama, and has a message to it. He felt the most interesting part of bringing this play to the stage was the bits that they had added in; such as the street scenes, and the main character, Christopher, using a camera.

Once settled in the theatre seats, which were filled



The players wow audiences with elaborate, period accurate costumes and sets.

almost to capacity, the crowd showed enthusiasm as the lights flicked their warning, and Glenn and Joy Evans took the stage to address the gathering. They spoke for a few minutes, talking of opening night and how this show had been a labor of love, as well as mentioning the new scene shop that hadn't even been used to make a set yet. The directing duo thanked the attending veterans for their service, and when they asked they learned there was even a World War II veteran in the audience, which held special significance considering the subject matter and era of the show.

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Once they were finished, the lights dimmed and the music began. Spotlights highlighted large black and white photographs from the 1930s on the stage walls. A couple sat at a café table, a bicycle crossed the stage, a woman sold flowers to passerby in the street, and a paperboy waved his wares at the crowd. Then Christopher Isherwood, played by Chad Lewis, came on stage with his camera and the audience was transported to a writer's small rented room in Berlin, Germany.

The play was inspired by a short novel, Goodbye to Berlin, which is often within the collection of stories by author Christopher Isherwood, The Berlin Stories. I Am a Camera was first seen on stage in 1951 and on film in 1955. It became a Broadway musical in 1966, and renamed Cabaret, which later went on to become a film starring Liza Minnelli as Sally Bowles. The title was taken from the first page of the novel, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive recording, not thinking."

Deanna Lavery as Sally Bowles and Chad Lewis as Christopher Isherwood were flamboyant and over the top, everything someone would expect or hope for in the characters they portrayed. The costumes were wonderful and Kyle Snider as Clive Mortimer and Carolyn Reiner as Natalia Landauer were the best dressed, sporting delightful fashions of the bygone era. Anita Harrower as the landlady, Fraulein Schneider, won the crowd over the moment she took the stage, as did the fun but haunted Fritz Wendell, played by Brett Hermance. I must say that this reporter would love to have lunch with those two characters, just to bask in their memories of the past or hopes for the future. Mrs. Watson-Courtneidge, played perfectly by Kathryn Shepherd, didn't enter the show until late in the performance, but instantly played counterpoint to the free spirit of her daughter, Sally Bowles, making me cringe and dislike the character immediately, no matter how much I related to her and her position.

All in all, a delightful production that provided entertainment, and provoked deeper and meaningful thoughts. The meet and greet with the cast afterwards allowed the audience to mingle with the wonderful performers, who were all gracious and friendly. To miss this experience would be a crime.

Westmoreland Players Theatre is located at 16217 Richmond Road, Callao, Virginia, and can be reached by phone at (804) 529-9345 or found online at [WestmorelandPlayers.org](http://WestmorelandPlayers.org).

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