

## REVIEW

# Despite its flaws, 'The Nerd' gets laughs

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The Williamston Theater wanted to lighten things up for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays this year. Larry Shue's raucous, slapstick comedy "The Nerd" is filling the bill.

Directed by Williamston's Executive Director, John Leopard, "The Nerd" features masters level theater students from the Michigan State University in major roles, this production marking the theater's 10th collaboration with MSU.

This rollicking comedy is all about Wil Cubbert (Greg Hunter) a young architect with a bright future, but is stagnant and can't seem to make important decisions about his love life or his career. Kristy Allen plays Tansy McGinnis, his girlfriend.

We meet various characters that complete the comedy set-up for the show. Blake Bowen gets the most laughs as Wil's friend Axel Hammond, a man with strong and humorous opinions who is a theater critic



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS PURCHIS.

The cast of "The Nerd" now playing at the Williamston Theatre, from left, Alex Leydenfrost, Greg Hunter, Desten Knox, Eric Eilersen, Blake Bowen, Anne Miranda and Kristy Allen.

(certainly a very questionable profession).

The set, designed by Bartley H. Bauer, looks like an actual living room with bookshelves, doors and personal items.

Next up is Wil's architectural client, Warnock Waldgrave (Alex Leydenfrost) along with

this wife Cielia (Anne Miranda) and the enthusiastic young (Okemos middle schooler) actor Desten Knox, as their son, Thor.

This opening section of the play drags a bit, lacking the punch that a good comedy should have. Leydenfrost plays a good, exasperated business-

man, and young Knox gives his few scenes enough energy to illuminate all of downtown Williamston.

Things perk up when Eric Eilersen appears as the nerd himself, Rick Steadman. He is an aggravating, obnoxious character who turns everyone off. For years, Wil has been

regaling his friends with stories of how Steadman saved his life in Viet Nam, but the insufferable guy who turned up was not what they expected. And the laughs begin.

As the play continues and the action becomes over-the-top crazy, the audience finally becomes engaged and responds with laughter. But too many of the jokes fall flat, and the actor's faces do not show enough expression, proving how difficult it is to execute good comedy on a live stage.

Timing, expression, vocal nuance, and physical movement, layered on a tight script create infectious laughter from an audience. Too many of these elements were missing to make "The Nerd" crackle. Most of the cast lacked the experience to make the lines snap with confidence.

But "The Nerd" is a classic comedy and many people will find it very funny. The stage is filled with lots of action and goofy gags which can make the play entertaining, despite the imperfections.