

The Dice House Review  
By Michael Makuch

On Sunday, June 10, I drove down to Dayton to see a play called “The Dice House,” which was produced by the Dayton Theatre Guild. I have only seen a handful of plays over the years and I wonder why I don’t see more, as I always enjoy them. I attended this play at the invitation of my friend, Blake Senseman, a Tipp City native, who stars in the play. Senseman has been involved in theatre in a variety of capacities for many years and I have listened, at length, to many stories about his various experiences in the world of theatre, so I was certainly interested in seeing him in action.

The Dayton Theatre Guild, hereafter referred to as DTG, is located in west Dayton on 2330 Salem Avenue and is a fairly easy drive from Tipp City. Driving to DTG on a Sunday afternoon, as the play started at 3 p.m., was very pleasant because there was not much traffic and none of us drivers seemed to be in a big hurry. By the way, the theatre is unobtrusive and easy to miss if you are not looking for it.

DTG’s theatre is a small, rectangular affair with the seats positioned on three sides of the stage. The word stage is not entirely appropriate, as most of it is floor level with the seats surrounding it. This makes for a unique theatrical experience, as it places the audience up close to, and around the action. Also, with a 90 seat capacity, there is no bad seat in the house. I arrived early and so had time to soak in the atmosphere and check out the set. The set and props were fashioned using art deco as the inspiration and, at least to my eye, were quite convincing.

Finally, Greg Smith, the director of the play came out and spoke to the audience briefly before the play began. Smith was very witty and this set the tone for the play, which is quite humorous. Upon his completion, the stage went complete dark and music played momentarily as Dr. Drabble and Matthew, played respectively by Blake Senseman and Mark Diffenderfer enter the stage to begin the first scene.

For the next two hours I was amused and delighted by the actors’ performance. The play has eight characters, all played competently by: Blake Senseman who plays Dr. Drabble, a psychiatrist with a dark agenda; Mark Diffenderfer plays Matthew, a patient and pawn of Drabble’s; Amy Hamilton plays Lisa, a woman who lives in the Dice House, doesn’t care for dice therapy and is waiting for her husband, a man she has yet to meet; Dr. Ratner, played by Gil Martin, runs the Dice House and is the greatest proponent of Dice Therapy; Elena Monigold plays, Polly, Dr. Drabble’s wife: She has left her husband to live in the Dice House because she has fallen sway to Dice Therapy; David Sherman and Wayland Reid play Mr. Smith and Victor respectively: two of Dice House’s more bizarre characters; And then there is the enigmatic Slow Assassin, played by Philip Titlebaum. All the actors have had prior experience in theatre and I was certainly impressed by their performances. I was especially impressed by Senseman’s performance. This is probably because, unlike the other actors whom I have never met before, I had a frame of reference of Senseman in real life to contrast with his playing a character, a character who is quite different than the guy I know. So that was interesting to say the least. All of the characters are a little nuts and over the top in a very “Monty Pythonesque” way and if you are fans of that seminal show, you will love The Dice House.

The Dice House is based on a novel by Luke Rhinehart. The Belegarde Theatre, over seas, commissioned Paul Lucas to write the play in 2001. This is the second production of this play in the United States and the first time to appear in the Dayton metro area and is produced by K.L. Storer.

I won't give too much away, but the plays thesis is a concept called "Dice Therapy." The way dice therapy works is: You choose a number of possible actions or outcomes, assign them a number and roll the dice. If you roll an even number, for instance, then you would choose the even numbered option and act accordingly, thereby removing the notion of calculated thought going into your decision making process. The therapy is used by Dr. Ratner and his patients in order to alleviate whatever feelings of dementia or conformity in their lives they may be experiencing. In Polly's case, she was stifled by a life of boring stagnant conformity. In her words, she explains why she embraced Dice Therapy, "I didn't realize how deep the sickness ran. The world has been systematically poisoned by the unmiraculous, and the venom is already in the collective bloodstream. It makes people walk around puddles. It makes them turn up for work. Lead lives of quiet obedience while your heads are teeming with delusions, confusions, compulsions, revulsions, repressions, obsessions and manic depressions. Medically speaking I don't think anyone over the age of 12 is safe to be let out on the streets. I for one will not live the few brief years of life that "Chance" has afforded to me within the great padded cell of conformity. It's like drowning in a bucket of water." Dr. Drabble doesn't buy into Dice Therapy because he believes that people will only choose options they are capable of, thereby making the dice unnecessary. The flaw, in Drabble's opinion, is the dice only work when the user creates the options. When someone else creates the options, the dice will not work because an option may be beyond the capacity of the roller to enact. In Dr. Drabble's words, "...that's where it's so terribly flawed. Because she only (referring to Polly) picks options she knows she's capable of achieving...She is motivated to choose a set of fundamentally comfortable options." Ultimately, Dr. Ratner, after being exposed to this flaw, sums up his final defense for Dice Therapy this way, "Well, the world can go sniveling back to Freud if it likes, but it'll do no good. Therapy only exhumes the skeletons, it doesn't exorcise the ghosts. Chance governs all life on this planet whether people play the dice or not. What determines whether the train you take to work arrives on time – or spirals off the rails into the local Starbucks? What eradicated the mighty dinosaurs with a lazy yawn? What created every human alive tonight with the same indifferent shrug? We all owe our very lives to Chance. And yet we fear and run from her, disowning our own mother. You think making all decisions spontaneously is too radical and extreme a way to live. But it's no more radical or extreme than making no spontaneous decisions at all. You can never hope to feel alive unless you honor your creator now and then by just suddenly doing something you really haven't thought through."

As mentioned earlier, The Dice House is absurdly funny and is a little risqué also. The play has two acts, separated by a 15 minute break, and a total of seven scenes. The Dice House began its run on June 8 and plays until June 24. The play will run its last weekend this Friday, Saturday and Sunday, so you still have time to see The Dice House if I've piqued your interest. For more information, check out [www.daytontheatreguild.org](http://www.daytontheatreguild.org).