

**One-man tour de force - fascinating story superbly delivered**

Theatre review by John Busbee

Theater...for a change (TFAC) is quickly evolving into a major player in the Greater Des Moines theatre scene. Producing artistic director, Thatcher Williams, opens TFAC's third season with a gem, the Doug Wright award-winning play, "I Am My Own Wife." This show gives Iowa audiences the chance to experience a compelling story, superbly delivered in a powerful performance by Dean R. Krouch.

Based on a true story, and inspired by interviews conducted by the playwright over several years, "I Am My Own Wife" tells the fascinating tale of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a real-life German transvestite who managed to survive both the Nazi onslaught and the repressive East German Communist regime.

Wright's resulting script reveals a complex, passionate and compassionate focal point. This intriguing play uses one actor representing almost 40 different characters.

Krouch, under the deft direction of Williams and Ron Ziegler, embodies an almost-fragile, yet steely, Charlotte. Through expressive body language and masterful vocal command, Krouch shifts from one character to the next with chameleon-esque ease. Each primary character is clearly defined, with his repeated returns as Charlotte a delight to witness. Krouch seductively slides into her persona, wrapping himself in his Charlotte. The original sound recording of the real von Mahlsdorf adds to his eerie immersion into the role. Krouch delivers a diverse, at times brilliant, mastery of stagecraft in this one-man tour de force.

Additional kudos go to Williams' production team. Scenic Designer, Paul Pape, creates an effective, complementary backdrop for the production's flow, nicely filling the Viking Theatre with an array of antiques and set elements. His miniature design work, important props for Charlotte, are stunning. Jarrod Bodensteiner's lighting design subtly leads the audience through the scene shifts, providing great visual ebb and flow. The sound design, with original music by Ryan Rumery, adds a layer that many productions seldom achieve. Rumery's work provides a rich aural texture to an already vibrant production.

TFAC demonstrates a fast-track maturation with "I Am My Own Wife," packaged in a very user friendly way: tremendous production value with an affordable ticket price. A good product at an appealing price – who'da thought basic marketing could so easily adapt to selling live theater? This cerebral sensation should be on everyone's calendar. The show runs through September 17 at the Viking Theatre, Grand View College, East 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Grandview Avenue, Des Moines.