

[theatre]

by Robert Barossi

RWU books 'Liz'

Any play that includes a cloistered religious sect, a restaurant staffed by recovering alcoholics and cockney-speaking Ukrainian immigrants has satire written all over it. That's exactly what RWU is presenting with their upcoming production of the comedy *The Book of Liz*.

The play is written by the famous brother-sister duo of David and Amy Sedaris. David is an essayist known for his work on NPR and books such as *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. Amy has appeared on stage, in television and in movies, from *Strangers With Candy* to *Elf* and many others.

Director Robin Stone, an Assistant Professor of Theatre at RWU, says, "I knew much of David Sedaris' work prior to selecting this play. I enjoy his books and his appearances on NPR. It was because of his sense of humor that I decided to read the play in the first place. After reading it I knew I wanted to work on a production of *The Book of Liz*. I was unfamiliar

with his sister's work, but while doing research for the production, I've also come to respect her humor a lot. She has a great recipe for

THE BOOK OF LIZ

Barn Summer Playhouse
RWU's

Performing Arts Center
Bristol, RI
(401) 254-3666

Runs Fri & Sat at 8pm
thru July 7.

cheese-balls! She originated the role of Liz, and I'm sure wrote it with herself in mind, and I've seen pictures and read accounts of her approach to performance."

As far as his vision for the play, Stone says, "Because the writing is so funny and clever, trying to impose comedy or some kind of complex metaphor would have been inappropriate.

The basic image-metaphor is that of a cheesy pop-up book. The scenery is comprised of a book that changes pages for the different scenes. The visual elements are a combination of two-dimensional



paintings and three-dimensional objects, the costumes are a bit exaggerated, and the music is a real cornucopia of cheesy stuff. We also don't pay much attention to the fourth wall, so the audience will see the mechanics of the production throughout the show."

The comedy "Is very much based in character and dialogue. There is little physical action but a lot of verbal wit that springs from some eclectic and eccentric characters. There are also a lot of satirical jabs at pop-culture," Stone says.

Satire has its share of challenges. According to Stone, "It was challenging to manage the technical requirements, lots of scene changes and props in a small, intimate space. It is also challenging for all the actors to tune into the humor of the authors. The humor is often dry, but always clever. Some of the actors didn't know anything about the authors or about their preference for irony, sarcasm, and satire. Careful timing is necessary. There isn't a lot of movement so pacing, tempo, and emphasis has greater importance.

This continues to develop and will continue to evolve after we get audiences."

Stone describes some underlying themes in the play, saying, "There is a very interesting examination of the importance we put on clichés. Religion, rehab, and just day-to-day life in America is ruled by slogans and trite phrases. The play pokes fun at our preference for and reliance on clichés," but he points out, "The play is not at all heavy handed, but celebrates society and culture with clever playfulness."