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Published Sunday, November 7, 2004

## Murder Show Livens Up Evening Out

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The Ledger

LAKE BUENA VISTA -- Whodunit?

I'm not telling, even though I know who the kidnapper is in "Mystery, Mayhem and the Mob," voted No. 1 by the FBI among mystery theater shows.

To find out, you'll have to go to Baskerville's restaurant in the Grosvenor Hotel in Lake Buena Vista on a Saturday night and experience this fast-paced, frenetic and furiously funny evening.

"Mystery, Mayhem and the Mob" -- otherwise known as the Italian show -- is one of three productions that rotate at the Grosvenor and one of seven that are part of MurderWatch Mystery Theater. All are written by Jeffrey Gay and his wife, Connie, producer and director, respectively, of Dreamland Productions.

In the early to mid-1990s, the FBI sent 200 detectives to interactive murder mystery shows throughout the country to seek the best, Jeffrey Gay said. The FBI voted the Italian show No. 1.

"Mystery, Mayhem and the Mob" centers around the engagement of Maria, daughter of Don "Jumbo" Thomasino, and his wife, Rose, to race car driver Marco Grimaldi of Monaco.

They go out to dinner to celebrate, but are quickly disappointed: Thomasino thought he was booking the restaurant for a private party, but when family members arrive they find others dining there. They stay, though, because management had been warned in advance of their arrival to try to prevent any Tony Soprano-type hits on the mob family.

FBI Agent Elliott Finesse, who has been tipped to impending danger, is ready to pounce on the thugs should anybody make a wrong move.

Of course, stuff happens. And it's up to you to figure out whodunit.

And don't be surprised if you become a suspect before the evening is over.

But before you get into the madness of the show, your night starts out quite deliciously.

Upon arrival, you're greeted at the door by a hostess who explains how the evening will work. There is a buffet dinner with dessert, and soft drinks, wine and beer (included in the price) are served at your table. That's all intertwined with the show for roughly two hours.

The "show" begins when the actors mingle with the crowd, setting the stage, so to speak, for what will happen. They also "encourage" audience members to participate in various ways, thus setting up an interactive show.

They don't, however, "pick" on people, Jeffrey Gay said, selecting only people who want to get into the act.

Because it's a dinner-theater type setting, there is no real stage. The action takes place among numerous tables that seat four to eight people each -- about 160 people in all. In fact, the foursome who star in "Mystery" are seated at a table among other guests.

While at dinner, the stars converse with nearby guests at will, making fun of their clothes, asking questions, commenting on the food, and more.

Action takes place throughout the room.

"Everybody sees something, but nobody sees everything," adding to the mystery of the evening, Connie Gay said. She calls it "theater in the surround."

She and Jeffrey Gay came up with the storyline for the three "M" show one night at dinner, scribbling notes on a napkin, Jeffrey Gay



"Mystery, Mayhem and the Mob" makes for a frenetic evening at Baskerville's restaurant in Lake Buena Vista. Provided to The Ledger

said. All seven shows are original.

"We try to make a fun show that isn't gruesome," he said. "It's really a family-friendly evening."

The Gays are members of Mystery Writers of America, along with such writers as Sue Grafton and Michael Crichton. At last year's National Mystery Convention in Florida, they performed for Dr. Henry Lee, a world renowned forensic scientist, and Grafton, Jeffrey Gay said.

They've recruited people from around the state, including cities as far away as Jacksonville and Fort Myers, who come on Saturday nights to perform. Carol Powella of Lakeland is one such person; she started acting with the show when it opened -- 15 years ago Oct. 6.

"This really is a phenomenon," Jeffrey Gay said. "All these people who are involved in it, 35 or so, have a piece of emotional ownership in this. The audience can tell that these people all are having the greatest time of their life doing this."

Disney chefs prepare the buffet dinner, which includes such entrees as chicken piccata, sauteed snapper, prime rib, lasagna, sauteed shrimp in American sauce, and sausage and peppers. Side dishes included garlic smashed red potatoes and ratatouille.

If you think that's all the choices you have, fuhgettaboutit.

Many of you likely will make your entree from the many selections on the salad bar.

On top of your crisp lettuce you can pile garbanzo beans, crumbled bleu cheese and about every other topping imaginable. Add to that a cheese, cracker and fruit assortment; rolls; and soup (on this day corn chowder) and you have a meal in itself.

Desserts on a recent night included a choice of six cakes, mini pastries, pudding, cookies and two hot desserts, such as apple crisp.

The food is good. I didn't hear one complaint about the quality, and there certainly was enough. Once a serving tray started to empty, someone was right there to fill it back up.

So if you're looking for something different to do, something that even the kids will enjoy, you may want to try this murder mystery dinner show. Even if the kids don't figure out who the bad guy is, they'll have fun trying in this interactive experience.

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