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## [Play draws laughs from golden age of comedy](#)

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Laura Godfrey/Toronto Observer

**JOVIAL JOKESMITHS:** The East Side Players' show *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, a '50's era comedic memoir about the writing staff of an NBC variety show, runs Oct. 29 to Nov. 14. (L-R) David Barber as Val, Robert Ouelette as Milt (back), Daryl Marks as Max, Valerie Abels as Carol and Chris Irving as Kenny.

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On the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor of New York's Rockefeller Plaza, a man wearing an argyle-print sweater vest awaits his co-writers for one of NBC's most popular variety shows.

"I guess this is what I've dreamed of my whole life. There's no comedy in all of television like *The Max Prince Show*," he says.

So begins *Laughter on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Floor*, the latest stage show from the [East Side Players](#). It runs Oct. 29 to Nov. 14 at the Papermill Theatre (67 Pottery Rd.).

This comedic memoir, written by playwright Neil Simon, is based on his early career as a writer for the '50s era variety show *Your Show of Shows* that won an Emmy award for Best Variety Show in 1952 and '53.

The man in the sweater vest is Simon's alter ego, Lucas Brickman (portrayed by Matt Domville). The bright-eyed, fledgling writer addresses the audience throughout the show as the writing staff deals with the network's attempts to dull their style of comedy and cut their budget by a third.

Unfortunately for the writers, it seems the network is only interested in "kids named Beaver and fathers who know best."

According to director Harvey Levkoe, this show recalls a golden age of comedy, and a style of humour

that can't be found on TV today.

“(Your Show of Shows) was a breakthrough. We had just come through the era where there was vaudeville, so the influences were very different than they are today. The jokes and the humour were much cleaner,” Levkoe said.

The humour may be cleaner than the sexually charged content we're used to today, but it shows an irreverence and charm perfectly befitting the time.

In the opening scene, Brickman explains why the show's writers supposedly make more money than the governor of New York: “Well, they were funnier than the governor of New York!”

In order to portray the 1950s era accurately, everything on the set had to be carefully selected to capture the mood, from women's flip hairstyles to altered *New York Times* newspapers.

“There are a number of people around the company who remember the '50s, so one of the things I have to deal with is the ‘experts’: ‘this isn't the right phone’ or ‘they didn't have pushpins, they only had thumbtacks.’ So we're trying to capture that authenticity,” Levkoe said.

But when you look beyond the humour, *Laughter on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Floor* is about a group of writers united in a fight to maintain their artistic vision without losing each other in the process.

“I don't wanna fire anyone!” laments Max Prince, the fictional show boss. “My writers are my flesh and blood. There is no miscellaneous in my body.”

Levkoe said he's happy to see that much like the characters in the show, the actors in this production have bonded as a result of all the time spent in rehearsals.

“What they really are is a family,” he said. “And that's what Neil Simon's intent was: to show how these writers worked as a family, given that they had to do this week in and week out, six days a week to put on a live show.”

For those who want to learn more about the performance, a Q & A with the actors and director will follow every Wednesday night show.

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