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At dinner theater, murder's never been so much fun

By Arlene McKanic
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This writer couldn't help but notice the name tag and huge round pin on the man's suit as he wandered through the crowd in Tiffany Room at Riccardo's in Astoria. He stopped and looked down at me.

"I'm Richard!" he said. "You took the embalming class with me, remember?"

"Oh right! Yeah!"

"You were good in that class. You have quite a future in embalming."

Thank you!"

Of course, I was never in the man's embalming class and he was no embalmer. He was one of the actors in the riotous production of "Graduation to Murder!", part of that evening's dinner theatre entertainment.

The slight plot revolved around an alternative prom thrown by teachers of an Astoria vocational school.

The kids were mad because the real prom had been canceled because every student had a raunchy Facebook or Twitter handle, and at least one of the kids wanted revenge. So a severed foot turned up in a shopping bag, then a severed head, and then one of the teachers was poisoned. The audience, which became part of the graduating class along with the actors scattered throughout the ballroom, were given ballots to write down who they thought did the deed.

"I don't remember the names of any of these people!" my tablemate said to me after all the suspects had been named, but it didn't matter in the end.

The evening was presided over by a faux policeman named Officer Dorsey. He would grab random people from the tables and finger them as suspects. Some people were a bit more enthusiastic about the experience than others, most of them were good sports about it (the ballot, by the way, came with a long disclaimer letting you know that if you didn't want to participate to tell "Officer Dorsey" up front). A few folks were extremely eager to participate. They tended to be from that one table that was rowdier than all the others, and this before any of the people at that table had even gone to the bar.

Food was served in between "acts." In Riccardo's case, there was a buffet up front, which had meatballs, sausage, ribs, calamari, yellow rice, cubes of cheese and cold cuts. The fruit salad was served later, and for dinner there was a choice between steak and salmon fillet with side orders of broccoli, something like a large hush puppy, and for the fish eaters, a wedge of lemon. Coffee and dessert followed.

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Graduation to Murder! is but one of the murder mysteries that will be staged around the area by the Killing Kompany, which bills itself as New York's leading mystery dinner theatre group.

On July 16 at 8 p.m. they'll stage "Murder At the Summer Ball!" at The Views at Mt. Fuji, Route 17, Hillburn, NY to be followed by "Beach Party Murder!" at Villa Umberto, 90 Meacham Ave. in Elmont on July 29 at 8 p.m. (\$60 per person, including wine and beer). More shows will follow at Hillburn and the company will return to Riccardo's on Sept. 23 at 8 p.m. (\$45 per person).

All in all, their first show was a raucous good time.

Check out www.killingkompany.com for more information.

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Brooklyn Women of Distinction Hey all, we wanted to give you the first look at our program for the Women of Distinction Gala coming up in about two weeks! We'll

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