

Girard's Nude

By Kristin Bayer

Music and lyrics by Deanna Gibeau

Based on a novel by Nancy Sweetland

Overview:

Girard's Nude is a comedy set in the 1950s, in the style of 1950s musicals, that deals in a light-hearted way with the larger issues of art vs morality, a woman's right to independence and self-expression, and the narrow social definition of beauty.

Synopsis

It's 1953 in Waldenford, Pennsylvania, where middle-aged Ethel Evans is happily married to Ernest. Well, pretty happily married to him. Most of the time. You know how it is. Oh honestly, is this really all there is to life?

The play opens with Ethel and her husband Ernest getting dressed for an evening out. Everything they do is by rote. Ernest is Ethel's high school sweetheart, and he loves Ethel, every bit as much as he loves his golf game. He's not thrilled about the cocktail party Ethel drags him to, though, in honor of some French so-called artist. But Ethel insists that they go, and that Ernest stretch himself, because she desperately wants some life in her life.

Girard, the French artist, is famed for his reclusiveness as much as for his artistic skill and versatility. Art aficionados at a gallery in New York wonder where he is and what he's working on. Rumor has it, it's a nude. Meanwhile Girard is laying low in Waldenford, tolerating the small-minded gossip in exchange for the peace and privacy to work.

At the cocktail party, Girard sees Ethel and knows immediately that he has found the model for his next work, a series of nude studies. Getting her alone, he tells her she's beautiful. Ethel dismisses him as a hopeless flirt, after all, what can he see in a frumpy woman well past her prime, especially one who has forgotten to wear her girdle. When Girard asks her to pose nude for him, she laughs him off. She laughs about it with her friends as well, but secretly cherishes the idea of being found beautiful, a new experience for her.

Ethel is taken by surprise the next morning when Girard appears at her door, ready to start preliminary sketches. She declines, but Girard is persuasive, especially when he explains that she will be paid, enough that for the first time she would have some financial independence. Ethel debates her options. On the one hand is losing the good opinion of her friends, family, and neighbors, and possible detrimental effects on her husband's job. On the other hand is the exciting prospect of a new adventure (and the money to buy Ernest some new golf clubs.) After thinking it over, with the unhelpful input of family and friends, she decides to take the risk to

pose, but with the stipulation that the project be kept secret. Although he finds the stipulation provincial, Girard agrees.

Meanwhile, Ethel's friend Angeline visits a gallery in New York, where she learns that the art world is searching for news of Girard and what he's working on. And so are the paparazzi, especially if it's as salacious as a secret nude. She decides to keep Girard's whereabouts to herself, and cuts her trip short to check out the situation for herself. If it's a nude Girard is working on, she'd like it to be of her.

Ethel's early attempts at modeling nude are fraught with comical problems, but eventually she and Girard settle into a routine. Where they'll work is a bigger problem, given Ethel's nosy neighbor lady, and Angeline's unexpected hovering. Girard finally rents an apartment in a neighboring town. Meanwhile, Ernest notices Ethel has been lying about where she has been. Angeline notices that Girard has been lying about what he's been doing. A reporter has gotten a lead on where to find Girard. And Girard's nosy new landlady notices that the curtains to Girard's new apartment are open, and she can see *everything*.

Almost immediately, rumors begin to fly that Ethel, the floozy, is having a torrid affair with someone in a neighboring town. Angeline, who had once been involved with Ernest, takes it upon herself to break the news to him. While she comforts him, they're seen, and more rumors start, this time that Ernest, the cad, is having an affair with Angeline. Ethel's busybody neighbor takes it upon herself to break the news to Ethel.

Distraught and hurt, Ethel confides in Girard. Seeing this as an opening for himself, Girard confesses to Ethel that he has fallen in love with her, and wants her to return to Paris with him. Ethel, though tempted, refuses him. Although she loves the excitement of her adventure, and her newfound independence, she doesn't want to lose her husband and marriage. Or the excitement and adventure and independence. Girard advises Ethel to confront Ernest and to stand up for herself. Then suddenly the paparazzi arrive, and the two are discovered.

Time has run out, and Ethel returns home to confront Ernest, who has returned home to confront her. After some confusion, the story comes out. Although they're relieved that neither is having an affair, Ernest is shocked that there are paintings of his wife in the nude, and that they'll be on public display. He'd like to buy them all and hide them in the attic, but Ethel stands up for herself, and finally convinces Ernest to support her. She admits that she never expected to be seen as beautiful, and he admits that he has always thought she was beautiful.

In the final scene, the paintings are on display at a gallery in New York. Girard comes out of seclusion to make a public appearance, wistfully accepting his defeat to Ernest in his effort to win Ethel. Ernest stands up to his disapproving boss. Ethel admits her involvement to the world. As the story ends, Ernest has taken up painting, and for his model, he's chosen Ethel.