

## **New Playwright's work 'Between Friends' brings standing ovation at Lighthouse**

By Lyn Tremblay

It's becoming a tradition of another play on the Lighthouse Festival Theatre's summer roster is packing the house. The latest, entitled, 'Between Friends' has audiences rolling in the aisles during the comedic parts and sitting spellbound and silent when the mood on stage turns a little more serious.

It is no surprise that the story in this first ever play written by new playwright John Spurway was inspired by a true-life experience. Most of those watching this play can also relate to how friendships can change throughout a lifetime.

The main characters in 'Between Friends' Dunc (played by Courtenay Stevens) and Sophie (played by Andrea Runge), are happy newlyweds, technically still on their honeymoon. When two of Dunc's oldest friends come for a weekend visit they are surprised to find that married life has changed their friend, and in their opinion not for the better. They don't think he's the same guy he used to be and don't believe there is room for them in his life anymore.

Sophie feels threatened by the closeness and camaraderie shared between her new husband and his old friends and when they are together she sees a side of him she has never seen before of a side she doesn't necessarily like. Dunc is caught in the middle between his friends Wally (played by Cory Doran) who is a beer-guzzling slob, Bill (played by Derek Ritschel) who is Wally's opposite, anal and serious, and his new wife. Another supporting cast member, Tanya Fraser who plays Sophie's friend Michelle, is there to balance the scales a little, lending some insight into Sophie's past and the reason for some of her insecurities.

The life lesson in this play, as playwright Spurway observes, is that some friendships weaken, others maintain, but some friendships actually get stronger when stressed. Over time and with experience, they endure, they grow, they deepen. If you're lucky.

Amazing for a first time effort by a new playwright, audiences are comparing 'Between Friends' with plays written by Canada's most talented and prolific playwright Norm Foster. The two playwrights are old friends and playwright Foster attended Opening Night last week. He had generous praise for his colleague. "I think this show is going to do very well in Port Dover," he said, "and I think it will have a life after Port Dover. It is very funny and the story is one that a lot of people will relate to."

Playwright Spurway has been a freelance writer since 1999, began working on this play in 2002 and continued writing it off and on over the next five years. For the last few weeks he has taken a vacation from his regular day job in the corporate world as Director of Information Systems for Atlantic Hydrogen, to be in Port Dover to watch his play come to life as a world

premiered on the Lighthouse Festival Theatre stage. "I've been bitten!" he told the Maple Leaf. "I couldn't ask for a better place for my first play. It's a great theatre. The audiences are incredible and Chris (McHarge) is such a great guy. I can't imagine it being any better."

Artistic Director Chris McHarge also gets very animated when discussing this latest production. He has built his career on developing new plays and new playwrights and he is extremely proud of John Spurway and his first play. During Opening Night last Thursday, he took great pleasure in introducing the playwright and his family, who had traveled from their home province of New Brunswick, to the audience. The crowd responded with a standing ovation for the playwright, and after the show as well, for the deserving actors.

Later, Director McHarge stated, "John was walking on air last night. He was overwhelmed with the reaction of the audience. I'm happy for him!"

"Between Friends" runs until August 16<sup>th</sup>. For more information contact the Lighthouse Festival Theatre box office at 519 583-2221 or visit [lighthouse theatre.com](http://lighthouse theatre.com)