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World Premier of Between Friends a Hit at Lighthouse

By George Teixeira Araujo

Lighthouse Festival Theatre goers have been treated to yet another world premier production that opened in Port Dover last week. Playwright John Surway can finally exhale and take a well-deserved bow as *Between Friends* is destined to be a hit on the live theatre circuit.

Surway's strong script offers blistering comedy woven with cutting and realistic relationship situations. That foundation, coupled with the superb casting and direction by Ron Gabriel ensures that the ebb and flow of the story move effortlessly, creating a show that demands your attention with every scene.

The play is set in the home of young newlyweds Dunc and Sophie. Married after a short courtship, Dunc embraces Sophie's simple and vegetarian lifestyle. Enter Dunc's lifelong drinking buddies Wally and Bill, arriving for the weekend to meet their friends new life and wife, although they both remain locked into the beer and pizza club. Throw in Sophie's pretty and practical friend Michelle, and you have all the ingredients for a rollicking weekend full of clashing idealism.

Dunc, played by Courtenay Stevens and Sophie played by Andrea Runge, seem happy and content until their visitors arrive and the newlyweds unveil their lifestyle. While Sophie seems to expect buddies Wally and Bill to conform to her granola and nuts offering, Dunc takes on the role of intermediary. He partakes in much of the banter with the boys showing Sophie a side that she has never seen before.

As the somewhat geekish Bill, Derek Ritschel along with Cory Doran's gregarious Wally, create a perfect partnership on stage, working the same comedic points from their very opposite personalities. As the story progresses both actors dig deeper into their characters as Wally begins to fall for next-door neighbour Michelle while Bill begins having doubts about the overpowering Sophie. Michelle, portrayed by Tanya Fraser, keeps her role beautifully simple bouncing back and forth as the only character that doesn't seem just a little bit crazy.

Courtenay Stevens brings us Dunc's struggles in life with realism and creativity. We all wait to see how Dunc will walk this tightrope and Stevens expertly keeps the many folds of his character close to the vest until the very final scene.

There are few characters on stage that I have disliked more than Sophie. To her credit Andrea Runge brilliantly delivers Sophie as covertly arrogant and manipulative yet with a fractured personality making her the perfect foil for the boys, friend to Michelle and maybe the perfect wife for Dunc.

I reserve my highest accolades for this play to the team at Lighthouse Festival Theatre. Researching and presenting a new play with an unknown playwright is honourable. But to

surround that play with an outstanding production team, too numerous to mention here demonstrates a sincere desire and commitment to develop quality theatre now and for the future. Hats off to LFT Administrative Director Helen Wagenaar and Artistic Director Chris McHarge for their continued support of Canadian Live Theatre.

Between Friends runs until August 16, tickets online at www.lighthousetheatre.com or by phone (519) 583-2221 or toll free at 1-888-779-7703.