

The Grand River Sachem • Friday, August 8, 2008

Lighthouse Theatre's "Between Friends" ... what a great place to be

By Denise Lemire

A lovely evening, a week ago, I found myself screaming down highway 6 again heading to Port Dover's Lighthouse Festival Theatre. This time, I was on assignment to cover opening night of the LFT's latest production, the world premiere of "Between Friends", a laugh per second comedy by John Spurway and directed by Ron Gabriel. This play marks Mr. Spurway's first time being produced. As noted by Artistic Director, Chris McHarge, Spurway's styling is very much like Norm Foster. Ok....so he had my attention and I was NOT disappointed.

We found our front row seats minutes before the lights dimmed and the action began. "Between Friends" is a very funny play about a group of 3 friends who meet up at the home of one of the guys. Now.....picture this....a newlywed couple, still in the throes of newlywed bliss, "welcome" two friends from his past. He has since made some personal "changes" so that his marriage runs more smoothly and very much in keeping with his wife, Sophie's thinking and way of life. The friends, Wally and Bill immediately notice things about Dunc that just don't make sense and cannot fathom why he would change just to please his bride...and.....the conflict begins.....

It is tummy-holdingly funny. Oh gosh...the laughs come one after the other all the way through. We cringe at some of the things said by these friends and wonder how they could be so boorish, given their friend's decision to please his bride.

Characters of husband, "Dunc" played by Courtenay Stevens and wife, "Sophie" played by Andrea Runge are so sweet, for want of a better word. Perfectly matched in the hopeful optimism of their new union which sets the stage for what's to come. Ohhh dear.

I was afraid to blink in case I missed something that would set off another laugh. "Wally" playfully presented by Cory Doran, along with Derek Ritschel's portrayal of "Bill", in no uncertain terms, threw the proverbial spanner into the works as the saying goes. Well, one thing after another...we see trouble a-brewin'. Dunc is now trying to maintain a balance between Sophie's obvious ire being raised by the second, from slow simmer to an all out rolling boil as these two buddies constantly remind Dunc of the old days and their blatant hinting at the way it was before "Sophie" - a time when they were basically 3 amigos having the time of their lives. These reminders, needless to say, grated on Sophie's initial acceptance of their presence. Before I give the entire plot away, I would say that this is a must-see production.

Courtenay Stevens' presentation of his character "Dunc" was very carefully and delicately played out. We saw him trying to convince his friends that this was his new life and it was for the better. We also saw him being torn, while still attempting to maintain his decision "for the best"....a very fine change in his depiction that was enjoyable to witness.

We empathized with “Sophie” as she felt bulldozed into spending the entire weekend with these “friends”. She was cordial and outwardly stressed.

“Wally” and “Bill” were very different characters but perfect reminders of “Dunc’s” past. We fell in love with “Wally” who was an in-your-face character but so endearing at the same time. “Bill”, whose moments of taking the concept of “taste-testing” to new heights, had us trying to catch our breath between laughs. Very Jim Carrey-esque, I loved his portrayal from start to finish.

I had seen Derek Ritschel in Norm Foster’s recent smash hit “Mending Fences” just weeks previous and was still riding that euphoric acceptance of another great actor who does what he does very creatively and perfectly.

Tanya Fraser’s portrayal of “Michelle” completed the perfect blend of characters. She was the woman, I felt, who held the two “sides” together. She was free spirited and compassionate. She was able to show a fun side and a more serious “shoulder” when needed. She breezed in and out of the scenes and gave a refreshing feel to some situations that were getting a tad overheated. Well, that happens when two different worlds collide and there just is no where to go but through the roof.

For people who might like to make a night out in Dover to include “Between Friends”...consideration perhaps should be given to the fact that a large portion of this production is about 3 men reminiscing about their pasts.

Lighthouse has to make their paper longer still, as yet another fine production gets added to their already extensive repertoire of audience-delighting showcase runs continues.

ANNND...I got to meet up with my new friend, Norm Foster...how great was that? Stop me somewhere when you see me and let me tell you all about it.

“Between Friends” runs from July 31st to August 16th. For tickets, give the box office a call at 519-583-2221 or 1-888-779-7703 or online at lighthouse theatre.com.