

## Spurway makes the uninteresting interesting in *The Numbers Game*

*Orangeville Banner*

Phil Gibson is not an interesting person.

He's the type of guy that corrects your grammar and lives by statistical likelihood instead of his heart.

Chances are you would avoid him at parties, if he were even invited.

Despite his social shortcomings, playwright John Spurway makes Gibson shine in *The Numbers Game*, which premiered at Theatre Orangeville on Thursday (Oct. 17).

The premiere of *The Numbers Game* is the first Spurway play produced at Theatre Orangeville, and the fourth professional production for the playwright. Nairn and the Spurway began workshops for the show in April.

The romantic comedy opens 11 hours after Gibson, played by David Rosser, received a Dear John text message from his wife, ending a 29-year marriage. Gibson is an actuary, consumed by numbers. So his separation was imminent, statistically speaking.

Although dull, Gibson is easy to relate to for the audience (I hope), from being picked on in school to being forced to talk to people he would rather not engage.

After getting the boot from his home, Gibson is forced to quickly find new accommodations. He answers a classified ad and finds his new roommate Bernadette, played by Nora Sheehan.

Gibson quickly realizes Bernadette, or Bernie, is a former high school classmate.

"Everybody knew her, where I was a major math nerd. She has no idea who I am, no idea whatsoever," Rosser told *The Banner*. "It's kind of that high school crush, and she's desperate for a roommate and I come across fairly harmless."

However, the once-prom queenesque Bernie doesn't recall Gibson from school. He didn't exactly stand out.

The mixture of the once popular girl and dork from high school is the real genius of the play.

Although both characters entered adulthood on different steps of the social ladder, 35 years later they find themselves in the same place in life.

"You've got people who've been through a few decades of experiences and in so many places they're no further ahead than a 20-year-old in their first serious relationship," Rosser said. "It's about time shifting, but so much of it stays the same."

As the story unfolds, Bernie and Gibson are forced to meet in the middle between his uptight demeanour and her carefree lifestyle.

Prying Gibson from his shell would be difficult without the comedic timing of Rosser. The actor is precise in his portrayal of a numbers nerd, while carefully using the characters' quirks to gain laughs from the audience.

And there's no shortage of laughs throughout the play. Spurway uses a mix of comedic styles from the clever wordplay with numbers to the slapstick flailing of Rosser's body language.

The chemistry between Sheehan and Rosser is obvious. Offstage, the actors are married and their knowledge of each other complements their characters well. It is easy to tell they are having fun with each other.

The story isn't limited to laughter. *The Numbers Game* tackles the notion of having to start over fresh later in life.

The more dramatic elements of the story are better suited for an older audience capable of understanding the gravity of a new life on the other side of the hill. As someone in his early 30s, it was difficult to relate.

Throughout the show, the two actors also play their main characters previous significant other. It's an entertaining concept to see Rosser and Sheehan return to the stage as previous memories of their main characters.

However, the flashback-style delivery is a little confusing at first, and the delay slows down the story momentum.

A nice touch to the show is the bonus content Theatre Orangeville has provided via Twitter. Social media savvy theatregoers can check out snippets of previous work by Rosser and Sheehan via @TheatreOville.



*Real life wife and husband Nora Sheehan and David Rosser star in the premiere of *The Numbers Game*, which debuts at Theatre Orangeville on Oct. 17. The production runs until Nov. 3.*

The Numbers Game runs until Nov. 3. For tickets, or more information, visit [theatreorangeville.ca](http://theatreorangeville.ca) or call (519) 924-3423.