

Grounded takes off at Lighthouse Theatre

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Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover has again blazed the trail in Canadian theatre with the world premiere of John Spurway's second effort *Grounded*.

Last season Lighthouse was the launching pad of Spurway's first play *Between Friends*. With *Grounded* he solidifies his position as a successful playwright in theatrical comedy.

Directed by LFT artistic director Chris McHarge, *Grounded* opens as a seemingly typical meeting of strangers in an airport terminal waiting for their plane to depart.

Veteran actor and director Ralph Small is Nathan Brewer, a loner accountant travelling on business to the Cayman Islands. While waiting to board his plane he is harassed by a quirky and laid back cosmetic salesperson Elizabeth, played by Debra Hale. They are joined by Marion, a modern grandma.

Marion, portrayed by Linda Goranson, quickly aligns herself with Elizabeth in trying to extract some meaningful conversation from Nathan.

It's snowing heavily. We hear that the plane they are all about to take to Newark and then on to the Caymans will be delayed an hour. This gives enough time for an eloping couple, Kate and Tony, played by Maria Dinn and Brad Austin, to make the flight and have their much dreamed of "wedding on the beach."

Throughout, everyone gets to play the role of inquisitor or counsellor as characters come back and forth from the washroom, coffee shop and other errands.

The humour is classic corny one liners with more than a few double entendres sprinkled liberally. The story takes many twists and turns until even the idea of what is going on becomes funny as it unfolds in front of us.

Each character is unique and every portrayal is careful and brought to the stage with confidence. Debra Hale and Small build smartly on their characters and gently expose Nathan and Elizabeth's awkward relationship with subtle expertise.

Dinn and Austin are believable in their roles as a couple on the cusp of a lifetime together, unveiling the inconsistency and uncertainty that comes with it.

Goranson wins over the audience as Marion, delivering her choice lines with excellent comedic timing and energy that has us eager to hear what's coming next.

The creative team of Steve Lucas, Claire Levick and Wendy Greenwood have successfully brought us into the bland world that is an airport terminal. The massive windows, raked seating, wall panels, bright lighting and ruffled costumes were all perfect appointments for the play.

I look forward to future works from this great Canadian talent.

John Spurway's *Grounded* runs until August 22. Tickets are available online at www.lighthouse theatre.com or by phone (519) 583-2221.