

Community Theatre REVIEW

Vagabond Theatre of Cornwall Ontario
Aultsville Theatre March 31 — April 8, 2006
Directed by Michael Togneri
Produced by Rick Jodoin

Female Cast: Katie Burke, Sue Kingston, Pat Haaksman, Kirsten Levac, Nancy Munro,
Lyn Paquin, Lacie Petrynka, Micheline Lacasse, Julie Latour, Melanie Taylor, Jamie Would
Male Cast: Scott Beaudoin, Neil Carriere, Kevin Kennedy, Jean Leger, Mike McAnanny,
Alan Mills

Stage Manager: Pauline Jodoin

Lights: Dan Youmelle

Sound: Bruce Manzer

Costumes: Myrna Earle

Set construction: Richard Jodoin

Set Decoration: Brian Hubel it

Performance viewed: April 2

Given Carol Shields' witty, intelligent script and Michael Togneri, a director who understands it, this production was already half way towards being a good afternoon of theatre. Add to that a slickly maintained pace, some effective sound effects and musical background, some very nice ensemble playing, and you pretty well have the package. I have some quibbles, but I'll get to them later.

The concept is simple: we are watching an indeterminate length of time in a typical airport public area. The set proclaims such with very familiar signage overhead directing us to Departures and Arrivals (of course), washrooms, baggage and so forth. Through the course of the play, we see silent actions and we hear conversations and interior monologues all of which tell us snippets of the lives of the passengers and crews who pass through. The tone varies from melodrama to touching reality, comic to passionate, surprisingly outspoken to sly innuendo. The style from the opening cinematic vignettes to surreal visitations from "above".

The performances, with almost every actor playing multiple roles made singling anyone out rather difficult, but there were a few worth noting. Scott Beaudoin is certainly a chameleon who is capable of just about any kind of metamorphosis, and he makes transitions so seamless that it seems as if he is not acting. The single most noticeable thread running through the action was the Pilot/Flight Attendant romance, depicted by Nancy Munro and Kevin Kennedy. The soapy theme music that accompanied it made the whole thing tie together in a deliciously campy way which made the audience really sit up when the theme started each time. I was a little puzzled by the initial tableau, which seemed to be out of character for the two, and occasionally, I found it hard to read Munro's motivation. Mike McAnanny was a natural on stage. I look forward to seeing more of the musician in speaking roles. Julie Latour and Micheline Lacasse, who were on stage almost the whole time as the desk clerks were admirable in that they were able to look so natural with so little script, without being distracting. Jamie Would, of course stole the show every time she was on stage, without being a brat. Katie Burke is sly in the Betty White role of stating the outrageous in a sweet little voice.

The action and dialogue certainly provoked belly laughs and at one point I felt myself tearing up (ulp!). The film crew scene featuring Beaudoin, Haaksman, and Carriere (in a fright wig) was hilarious slapstick which the entire ensemble pulled off without a miscue, although how Haaksman leapt over the barrier in heels is beyond me. I could not recognize who played the visiting woman in the scene with Alan Mills, but the scene was nuanced and delicious. The departure scene between Taylor and Carriere was hard-edged and moving.

I do have some reservations. Sound, while mainly effective and useful, missed on a couple of issues: the early voice-over of the young woman's thoughts was too loud and obviously amplified, making the return to live voice later a bit of a stretch. The announcements were entirely too intelligible to be real airport announcements. Who can ever hear those, anyway? I thought the point, particularly of the silly announcements, was to let the sound break through into intelligibility just when it had no meaning. The long onstage silence at the opening was I suppose unintentional. The set, while it was somewhat realistic (certainly insofar as logos, seat benches, and signs are concerned) was just overwhelmed by those heavy heavy black velour draperies that are everywhere on that stage. The idea of black backing is that you are not supposed to see it; in fact, it should be hung much further upstage, with no drapery, but with flat panels that do not pick up illumination. As it is, the draperies reflect huge distracting patterns behind the scenes, diminishing the scale of the actors. The scene in which Beaudoin was monologuing alternately against the melodramatic pilot and his ambitious lover had a lighting problems: Beaudoin's special was several levels dimmer than the pair of specials set for the lovers. As well, Beaudoin's special needed backlighting to set him off, particularly his dark hair against those omnipresent black draperies.

All in all, an ambitious undertaking, entertaining, textured, delightful ensemble work that is engaging, and well worth a look. Arrivals and Departures continues Friday and Saturday, April 7, 8. At 8 pm. - *riverwriter.ca*