

Norm Foster humour, talented actors drive the joy of Lunenberg



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When any of our lives are flipped upside down by a sudden turn of events, shock ensues and who we are directs how we handle the situation. This is frequently the premise of a Norm Foster play and he is the master of turning the ideas that flow from a large bump in his characters' roads into a couple hours of very funny and, usually, very thoughtful entertainment.

This year's Norm Forster play, Lunenberg, opening at Theatre Orangeville on Oct. 11 and running to Oct. 28, will deliver again the humour and the pull at the heart for which he is famous.

In brief, Iris Oulette's husband died where they lived in the USA. He left her a house in Lunenberg, Nova Scotia, which sounds alright until we learn that Iris knew nothing about it nor anything about her husband's Canadian life. In spite of the shock and surprise at this revelation, Iris is naturally also curious to visit her property in the Canadian wilds of this Maritime province, where she has never been.

As a vacation, one can enjoy the differences, in a place to which one travels as a tourist, that contrast to one's own home town. However, this little house in Lunenberg is Iris' property, a home of her late husband, and so, her perspective of the small Canadian town, in sharp contrast to her own large and American city, might mean a good deal more to her if she gives any thought to staying there.

She has travelled to Lunenberg with her best friend, Natalie Whitaker, who is there for moral support and whatever else is needed. Into all this comes the next door neighbour, Charley Butler, a stranger to the truth so we were told, and ready to meet the two ladies new to his block.

Telling us the sad but comical facts about Charley's penchant for lying was part of the discussion about the play with the members of its cast.

Welcome to Carolyn Scott as Natalie. Ms. Scott comes to us with an impression list of theatre, film and television credits that are mainly comedy. As a close friend to the grieving and puzzled widow Iris, Natalie ventures north with her to all the mysteries of this foreign home. Then, soon after they arrive, there is Natalie's introduction to Charley, who, for all his failings, is very charming. Great to welcome Helena Janik, playing Iris, to Theatre Orangeville. Ms Janik comes to us with a career of performance in theatres across Canada and is singing with the Frederick Symphony Orchestra this November.

While Iris struggles to deal with the unknowns and revelations about her late spouse, she may also have to counsel her friend, in her turn, if Charley brings on too much charm.

Always nice to have Terry Barna back on the main stage, this time as the bon vivant, Charley. Mr. Barna has delighted audiences with his performances in a number of Theatre Orangeville productions, including Sexy Laundry.

The problem of the differences between places came up as Ms. Scott explained, 'We're Americans and we're coming to Canada from a big city to a fishing village and this cottage is quite isolated.'

David Nairn, Artistic Director, commented on the roles of place in a person's life: 'It's a kind of experience, a sense of place - what works for you - where you want to be; finding that kind of place that suits you. It's not always easy.'

There could be lots of different reasons for that too.

Said Ms Scott, 'These are strangers in a strange land. Ordinary people coming into a strange land that is not anticipated, an extraordinary situation will alter three lives and never be the same again.'

Ms Janik added, 'This is a story about friendship - girls friends - that's very special. Guys come and go but girl friends are that sort of thread that keeps on going.'

Directing the production this time around is Sheila McCarthy, multi-award winning actor in theatre and film. When asked about directing this play, she replied, 'It's a great joy. This is a real explanation of the human condition, the text is very strong.'

Said Mr. Barna, 'I've done 12 Foster plays and, sometimes, you say- 'That can't be right-' because it was so natural - you think you've said it wrong. The trick is to do it just the way he writes it, stage directions, dialogue, all of it.'

Lunenberg is opens Oct. 11 with the preview; opening night is Friday, Oct. 12 and it runs until Oct. 28. Tickets and subscriptions at the Box Office, 87 Broadway or at the Information Centre on Buena Vista at Hwy 10; by phone at 519-942-3423 or online: tickets@theatreorangeville.ca