

A Bench in the Sun shines bright at Blackhorse

By Anne Ritchie

It's a time of recollection and learning, life experiences and relocations.

Blackhorse Village Players' current production, Ron Clark's *A Bench in the Sun*, is a story set in a retirement home where experiences and memories colour the lives and interactions of three residents not quite at death's door, but certainly in the neighbourhood.

Meet Burt (Ivor Cathcart), a man who shares his opinions freely, spending unexpectedly poignant moments in conversation with his departed wife. Cathcart rides the waves of dejection and frustration, conviction and persuasion, anchored by the need to disclose a dark secret. Burt is a mixture of complaint and contemplation, begrudgingly dealing with life in Valleyview Gardens where they do 'everything to keep you alive, nothing to keep you living.'

Cathcart has the ability to commiserate with an old friend and simultaneously competing for the attentions of a new resident. His humour emerges at the most unexpected times: not knowing French does not stop him from bidding 'Frere Jacques' in response to a romantic 'au revoir,' and somehow he has the last word in every conversation with his friend Harold.

Combine grumpiness and gusto, prickliness and romance and you have Harold (Walter Stewart). Being a contradiction in every way possible in a play that features creaking muscles and stumbling steps, his actions become as delightful as the dialogue. To rise from the park bench can be an adventure and when teaching the waltz, his cane becomes a third leg. Likewise, competitiveness trips friendship and business successes are mired in mistakes. Even so, Stewart makes Harold so human it's easy to sympathize with every turn in the road.

Life at Valley View Gardens is punctuated not only by the perky announcements from the intercom: ('smoking is permitted outside the Health Club only?'); it blossoms with the arrival of a glamorous resident, Adrienne (Ginny Cathcart). Adrienne can be sweet, glamorous and animated or teasing, fickle and flirtatious equally well, all learned through a lifetime of experience with five husbands. Ginny portrays the very colourful and complicated person skillfully in a role which contains enough unexpected turns to affect both Burt and Harold.

To merge the seasons and lesions of life from childhood to old age takes the skill of a well-seasoned director and Cheryl Phillips, assisted by Morris Durante, are a team whose talents match those of their cast. Their experience gathered in a great many seasons at Blackhorse contributes to the success of a production sensitively dedicated by Cheryl to her father, Gord Phillips. Given the contributions of producer Elizabeth Coulter and stage manager Julian Bachlow, assisted by Jessie Gordon, the evening is well worth a visit to Blackhorse Village Players.

A Bench in the Sun continues to April 8.

Call 905-880-5002 for ticket information.