

Blackhorse spins into Swing Dance in current production

By Anne Ritchie

From bongos and chanting to the music of the Singing Nun, The Blackhorse Village Players' current production of Swing Dance takes a spin into a memorable past.

Lynda Martens' comedy calls to mind an era where challenge took the lead, free thinkers paired and wives could change their husband's names as easily as their own.

In such an atmosphere, extravagant Dante becomes endearing Fred, played equally well by Blackhorse veteran Mark Hayward. Being a mentor for enterprising female CEOs calls for a flamboyant entry, and Hayward pulls it off from his colourful Italian neck scarf right down to his wingtip shoes. He exudes enthusiasm, confidence and an imagination that makes anything possible, whether creating a cupcake queen for a national food franchise or turning himself inside out to right a somewhat misguided marriage. How those ideas collide provides the music and theme to Swing Dance.

As Hayward's wife Jasmine, Michele Lanoue provides a flamboyant flare to the cosily kitsch stage setting, but that can change. From one extreme to the other, she balances her stage skills and experience to craft a difficult role and at a critical moment, smoothly turns the tables. Lanoue's talent is as bright as Jasmine's costume, and Vicki is believable as either a lead dancer or faithful follower.

The kitsch setting befits housewife turned media star Vicki Parker, played by Susan Jalbert. Jalbert, the creator of Cozy Country Kitchen and supplier of Blackhorse refreshments, emerges on stage as the Cupcake Queen as excellent in the spotlight as backstage. Jalbert sets the tone of Swing Dance, playing emotions that span prim and proper to incredulous, taking the lead when required, but dancing to her own tune, a self-made, strong character that will be the first to discern the outcome for all.

Robert Redden, a newcomer to the Blackhorse Stage, is set for success in the character of Vicki's husband, Walter. Walter is comically unsure of his footing in the dance; he plays to a waltz rather than a tango and is the picture of retirement in work as well as home. However, he is also quick to catch on and his reaction is priceless when he discovers his expected dance steps. Redden's 'secret signals' bring out a laugh each time they are played, his double-meaning understanding of cars is hilarious, and his amiability makes him a character the entire audience wants as a next door neighbour.

Director Morris Durante and Producer Elizabeth Coulter, with Stage Manager Jessie Gordon, bring the cast together admirably in the homey set designed by Cheryl Phillips and Durante. They lay the foundation for a unique play that frames a memorable phase when dance was king and romance played out in a style of its own.

Treat yourself to an evening to Swing Dance at Blackhorse Village Players, continuing April 6, 7, 8, 13, 14 and 15. Call 905-880-5002 for ticket information.



Michelle Lanoue-Williams, Mark Hayward, Robert Redden and Susan Jalbert are appearing on stage in the Blackhorse Village Players' production of the naughty comedy Swing Dance.