

Elvis and Mavis ? one person?s conflict with the big issues

By Constance Scrafield

How long is long enough?

That seems to be the question that confronts Elvis in the upcoming play, *Elvis and Mavis*, at Theatre Orangeville.

A drama written by Jeff Pitcher, this piece questions the cost of severe economic divides and the answers to those divides that one man might select. Set in the early 1990s in Newfoundland, the story presents Elvis, whose life so far has not been easy and who is finally so ?pissed off? with the way in which his home province and his fellow citizens are being treated by the powers that be that he decides to get their attention ? for sure ? by blowing up the Churchill Hydro Dam in Labrador. Only a renegotiation of the heavy handed contract that has been struck between Newfoundland and Quebec will appease and restrain Elvis from his purpose.

He advises his wife Mavis of his intentions by telephone and she, understandably, is appalled and concerned. Rather than stay in Newfoundland, where the natural resources are being drained by outside interests, Mavis wants to move to Ontario, to go back to school and get a job. While she is dealing with the possibilities she fears with Elvis' threats, she confides and is comforted by her neighbour Rose.

The three characters are presented to us by the talents of Darren Keay as Elvis, Jane Spence in the role of Mavis and Maria Dinn performing the part of Rose. All three of these fine actors are welcomed back to Theatre Orangeville, having each participated in a number of productions here.

Jane Spence told us in our preshow interview with this cast, ?Mavis is a character to fall in love with ? her life and her struggle and her relationship with Elvis. Jeff [Pitcher] has done a lovely job of weaving the past into the present.?

?The play is very resonant of what's going on around us today,? he added. ?If you're banging your head against the wall ? taking that kind of frustration, Elvis is you and your frustration. He wants to make this protest ? why? Because he's pissed off. But the why of the act of terrorism is just the skin of the onion. As we learn more about the characters, we unwrap the play.?

?There's something in Newfoundland about joining the Confederation,? Dinn, a native of Newfoundland, chimed in, ?They are still so independent. There is a lot of pride there ? what it means to be a Newfoundlander.?

Dinn's connection with this play is intensely personal, as she lived in Newfoundland at the time of this story.

?My family struggled a lot and knew what that means to self esteem,? she said. ?Yet, Newfoundlanders are so proud to be Newfoundlanders. I always considered myself a Newfoundlander first and a Canadian second. I've lived now off (the island of Newfoundland) longer than I did on, but it's home.?

She related the story that God created this beautiful but difficult place and, then, wondered who He would put there. So, He made people who were tough and special.

?People do want to leave because it is so hard,? she said, ?but they're afraid.?

David Nairn, who is directing *Elvis and Mavis*, remarked that he noticed a house here in Orangeville flying the Newfoundland flag along with the Canadian flag in front of their house.

?Those that have left tend to fly the Newfoundland flag,? Dinn confirmed. ?I see more Newfoundland flags wherever I go than any others.?

Keay enlarged on the theme we had struck: ?There's something different about Newfoundland and there is such a strong sense of community.?

Bringing the themes of Newfoundland into the play, Nairn added, ?Jeff captures the tremendous heart of Newfoundlanders. This is about the love of a person, a nation and home. And, of course, being in Newfoundland, there are moments that are very funny.?

Elvis and Mavis is on at Theatre Orangeville from March 27 to April 13. Tickets at the Box Office at the Town Hall on Broadway and the Tourist information centre on Highway 10 at Buena Vista Road. By telephone at 519-942-3423 and online at www.theatreorangeville.ca