

Elvis and Mavis: riveting drama, Newfie humour

By Constance Scrafield

What happens when a person finally comes to the end of his tether? What about when that person decides that it is worth his life to make a point?

If that person knows no one will be going with him, that order will be restored, that millions of people will only be inconvenienced? when is it time to make that stand?

The story of Elvis and Mavis begins with these questions and Elvis' answers, as he comes into a shed in the south, with a plan to blow up Churchill Falls, dam and all. This action will flood the valley, returning the water to the environment and cut off electricity to much of Quebec and New York City. And take Elvis with it.

Elvis and Mavis runs at Theatre Orangeville until April 13.

This play was originally a one-act rant on the part of Jeff Pitcher. It is a fanciful presentation, a fable, if you will, of ?What would happen if a person actually followed the dictates of his frustration??

?Elvis and Mavis was the first play I wrote when I left Newfoundland in 1991,? Pitcher wrote in response to questions about it . ?At that time, Newfoundland was in dire straits, the fishing moratorium was just announced. I was feeling deflated and a little angry . . . I . . . wrote this play, venting my personal frustrations with Newfoundland policies, etc!?

Elvis' wife Mavis is, meanwhile, back in their home, consulting with her best friend and neighbour, Rose, as the tension builds over Elvis and his terrifying determination. That is it in a nutshell, but the play is fantastic.

The build-up of the story of how Elvis came to this point: the scenes from their marriage from first love to rocky disillusionment; the small journeys he has made to discover why his province and his own life have come to this sour time; the desperation that finally drove him to this present moment, are all presented with passion and humour.

Into it all, is Rose, sitting at the kitchen table with her anguished friend. Like any real person, Rose vacillates between loving support for Mavis and antagonism with her. A Newfoundlander herself, Maria Dinn, nails the somewhat ambivalent role of Rose, torn as she is for Mavis' distress and Elvis' risks.

Of a necessity, these three brilliant actors give their all to the play and the play is only possible for it. They maintain a level of tension that is pure art and entirely enthralling.

Darren Keay is a wild man and his Elvis is wild, wonderful. He grabs your attention and does not let you off the hook for a moment. Every nuance of his monologues and his exchanges with ?the CBC? and Mavis are true, funny, frightening.

How do you think a wife would react to the news of her husband's plans to destroy a massive industrial site ? the Churchill Falls dam ? and take himself with it, whether they were estranged or not? Even she does not know. We watch her struggle with the flood of her emotions, pushing them back and forth between herself and Rose, and Elvis.

Jane Spence gives this part everything it needs to be believable and empathetic. She is all that a woman is, reflecting all that a turbulent marriage ? relationship ? demands and inflicts.

Naturally, there can be no Newfoundland dialogue without humour and this play is no exception: there are laugh-out-loud moments, keeping the characters true to life ? never forgetting the spontaneous wit of the Newfoundlander.

For anyone who saw the play Opening Night, the ending is somewhat different.

The set design by Sarah Scroggie is just right for the play: stark enough but interesting to look at, dividing the stage between the two situations of the shed, where Elvis is making his plans, and their home, where Mavis and Rose are dealing with those plans. Ice bergs in the background.

This is the first production outside Newfoundland of Elvis and Mavis. It is directed by David Nairn. As always, Nairn gives as much free rein to the instinct of his actors as makes sense ? he is a great believer in instinct. In this case, for sure, they come up to the bar with best results.

Once again, as Artistic Director he brings another ?voice? to the Theatre Orangeville stage. Do not miss this production. Bring your family; bring your friends. It is really marvellous.

Tickets at the Box Office at the Town Hall and the Information Centre on Highway 10 and Buena Vista Drive. Telephone 519-942-3423. Online at theatreorangeville.ca