

Fable or not, Queen Milli of Galt's a great show at Theatre Orangeville

By Constance Scrafield

It is truly said that truth is stranger than fiction.

In this charming truth-or-fiction play about a young lady in Galt, as was, who claimed to have been married to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, we are offered a choice to believe or not. Queen Milli of Galt tells the story of Millicent Milroy, who had her own epitaph written into the stone of her family's cenotaph, well before her own demise, a record of her marriage to the Royal personage, Edward VIII.

The play, written by Gary Kirkham, does not deal with the inscribing and reaction, but rather with the romance itself ? much more fun, of course, and more interesting.

He launches the story as a flashback from the moment when a young journalist seeks out the aged Milli, years after her adventure, to persuade her to tell him all which, at first reluctant, she does.

We time travel back to 1919, when Edward, Prince of Wales comes to Canada on official duty with an attitude that some of this must surely also be a good time.

The Prince slips his tethers, loosely held by his Aide, to dally in the neighbourhood. By chance, he meets a beautiful but rebellious young woman who is doing her gardening rather than dashing into town to catch a view of his Royal self.

This indifference to him fascinates him, as does the fact that she does not recognize him. So, he engages her in conversation, finds her blunt honesty refreshing and pursues her, in a back-handed sort of way. They begin to enjoy swapping insults while he escorts her to evenings with Canadian ?high society.? The repartee is very entertaining.

The sparks between them start a flame of love and the impossible union is the only desire of the Prince's heart. What can happen next? Come and see the play.

Heidi Lynch performs the role of Milli and she is exactly flippant and saucy, excited and passionate in turn, making each moment right.

As an 80-year-old and then a young debutante, she fills her role to a tee, running us through young Milli's early principles and later longings. She has such a sunny presence while possessing the talent to hold another moment in darkness. Everything this role demands of Lynch, she delivers in spades.

Welcome at last to the Theatre Orangeville stage to Mag Ruffman as Milli's eccentric mother, Mrs. Milroy. No one else could bring quite the comedic touch to this part as she does. She is one moment insanely distressed and the next equally delighted by her daughter's surprising relationship with Royalty. Whatever are the terrible or joyous emotions tearing at Mrs. Milroy's heart, Ruffman sees to it that we are laughing out loud about them.

She is a wonderfully funny presence on the stage and this writer certainly hopes we will find another excuse to invite Ruffman back soon.

Adrian Shepherd as Edward is all debonair charm and protest. In spite of a privileged life as a son of the King, he carries the emotional baggage of that life on his sleeve where his heart soon joins it. Both the baggage and the heart lead him in the choices he makes. Shepherd successfully handles the challenge of convincing us of the suffering and the bid for healing that the Prince endures. As the Prince's Aide, Sir Thomas Godfrey, Jefferson Mappin is at once an impressive presence and a humble servant. It is never easy to keep track of, let alone control, a wayward Prince but Godfrey does his best with such authority as he has. Godfrey is the glue that connects the elements of the story together, binding the plot with occasional messages and orders from the King back in England. Once more, a balancing act, which, in this case, Mappin deals with, with funny and severe.

Lauren Toffan, who commanded all the female roles (but for Miss Haversham) in Great Expectations to great effect, is back to Theatre Orangeville as Desdemona Singleton, famous actress but also Milli's best friend, Mona. Toffan shakes off the weighty bulk of Dickens' characters and gives us an effervescent Mona. Wearing beautiful costumes, Mona's airs and graces are all that and more. She too is funny and fresh, filling out the story with attempts to mollify the turbulence of Milli's adventure.

By the bye, the costumes, designed by Alex Amini, are terrific. True to the epoch and gorgeous, they are another part of the success of this show.

Likewise, the set, a real digression from Beckie Morris' usual designing is just right in its versatility, for the scenes move from place to place and the set is designed to eliminate what could be problematic but is not.

All in all, this is a play not to be missed: it is funny and poignant; the answer to the big question is one only you can provide. Queen Milli of Galt runs until May 25. Tickets as always at the box office at 519-942-3423 or online at theatreorangeville.ca