

?Looking? is fantastic at Blackhorse Village Theatre

By Anne Ritchie

It should come as no surprise that Blackhorse is ?Looking? good, when Norm Foster's play of that very name claims the spotlight. When the quick-witted playwright's talent is joined with a highly entertaining cast, the result is a match made in paradise, and ?a match made in paradise? is why Andy, Val, Matt and Nina are ?looking.?

Poor Andy (Vince Ursini) is so deprived of a match, it's suggested he ?crash a funeral? to meet someone at the wake, even though he isn't even the type to be ?looking? for a date in the bar. Instead, he opts to place an ad in the personals, and in print the sales representative of a struggling storage bin rental firm becomes a thriving businessman. Ursini is so versatile we can catch the undercurrent of truth as he plays out his ad. Andy admits he visits the library as a necessity and in conversation, spouts philosophical cliches, but with Ursini's down but not out appearance in play, the truth trips over the swagger, and just why the library is vital and how his philosophy came to be is cause to laugh. Ursini can make the character at the bottom of the barrel rise to the top and make both believable.

Val (Pam Cooper) is also ?looking? and Cooper searches so wistfully, so yearningly, so sympathetically, she easily captures the attention of audience and characters alike. Having exhausted the search through work, at the gym, in a failed marriage, and life in general, she scans the newspapers personals and up comes Andy. Cooper creatively portrays a complex character, mixing practicality with boredom, loneliness becoming guidance. Finally, in a moment that leaves the audience smiling, a spark of magic appears, brought out most sensitively. ?Looking? in the personals can yield surprising results.

Sparks fly unpredictably when Cheryl Phillips takes to the stage as Nina, a boisterous, surefire police officer. Phillips takes the stage with a well-known blaze of talent and in one of the funniest scenes, she certainly sets Matt on fire, igniting laughter and applause. They join forces in more ways than one, be it the phone, where joint messages are given in unison with amazing timing or in passionate embrace that leaves the audience laughing. Just as quickly, she turns the tables on herself, wondering how she ever got entangled in such a predicament. She, who began as a supportive friend, crumples when she falls for a guy, mortified because she wasn't even ?looking.?

While Matt (Morris Durante) was fired up to help Andy, even to spoonfeeding him his philosophy, he got the tables turned on him. When he gets the rug pulled out from under him and discovers he is ?looking,? laughter ensues. Matt's absolute bewilderment at what is happening is evident thanks to Durante's expression and split second timing, and when he erupts totally unexpectedly, the audience is drawn into it as if they were present on stage, in the midst of the action.

The audience is no less on stage thanks to the perky presence of Michelle Lanoue, who waits upon the tables not only to those who are ?looking,? but offering a saucy service up and down the aisle of Blackhorse Village Players.

Director Margaret Phillips and Stage Manager Marie Simms are to be congratulated for serving up another Blackhorse Village Players success story, complete with comedy, romance, storms and sentiment, all found as we are Looking at life.

See for yourself in Norm Foster's Looking, playing June 21 to 23 and June 27 to 29 at Blackhorse Village Players. Call 905-880-5002 for details.