

Plays until this weekend ? Baco Noir: more than one kind of Spirit

By Constance Scrafield

Poised on the hill upon which Lindy and Bruce are trying to establish a new vineyard ?north of highway13,? Baco Noir's tale of conscience versus brutal practicality plays out in a completely humorous way.

Big changes to anyone's life, especially those that are following a dream, can also bring sharp reality checks and difficult decisions. For this married couple in the new play now showing at Theatre Orangeville, the dream, the changes and the difficult decisions test their relationship as they begin to understand the differences in how they each see things.

Bruce's family were vintners in France for generations ? three generations ago. Answering the call of his heritage, Bruce must now compete with insects that live on the wild grapes around the land without harming them while those same insects demolish the Baco Noir vines that he and Lindy planted and have nursed for the last three years.

Their neighbourhood mentor, Oscar, the well worn farmer, brings his well-worn wisdom to the problem in the form of a large container of bug killer called Grim Reaper.

No need to say more for you to realise this is a Dan Needles play, recently penned by ?Dufferin's favourite playwright.? That tender touch makes us laugh out loud.

But, wait ? the city folk hauling their dreams to the country, the old farmer who will show them ?the right way? to do things ? sounds familiar to Wingfield fans. However, Needles takes us all several steps further by introducing a Spirit into the mix.

From the beginning, Lindy insists on putting all initiatives on hold until they have called to the spirits to join them in their efforts to save the vineyard and bring the vines forth to good health and fruition without the deadly use of the Grim Reaper bug spray. So, the two men make concessions, sitting obediently with their hands in a pose of meditation, calling on the guidance and assistance of the spirits ? of the earth and the rocks and the ancestors.

Much to Lindy's surprise, one of those Spirits accepts her invitation.

Taking on the form of Al, the pilot living down the road, whom no one ever sees, the Spirit meets with some resistance from Lindy as to whether or not she believes.

?But you invited me!?' he reminds her.

And so it goes, with the really amusing solutions to every clink in the road, to final resolution ? that is the reason we love Needles.

It is clear that the cast members are having fun doing this play.

Jay Davis, in his introductory role at Theatre Orangeville, is very amusing as the Spirit ? he has lots to work with in the way of funny moments.

Lindy and Bruce, played by Perrie Olthuis, returning to Theatre Orangeville, and Craig Pike, here for the first time, vie with each other, wrangling over their diverse views of what might work ? for the grapes ? for their marriage. They are sweet with each other, believable in their affection and sincere in their newlywed struggles, ready as well to deliver the laughs.

Terry Barna as Oscar is, just like the character you have met in your own back fields, the farmer of crops and earthy wisdom, dishing out the attitudes and advice that, at one and the same time, are familiar and fresh. Never sanctimonious; always hilarious and charming.

It is chemical blasting versus the organic way; practicalities versus hopeful alternatives; the paranormal versus the doubting.

Altogether, lots of laughs and lots to think about.

This is the world premiere of Baco Noir and each of these actors is blowing life into the characters for the first time on a stage, basically creating the flesh and blood versions.

Although any play you see for the first time is new to you, the initial productions of a play are important to the future of playwriting and theatre in Canada. This knowledge can make a difference to the way we perceive these new works, how patronising them, responding to them carves out the final version, the one that will go on to support other theatres across the country.

Interesting, isn't it, how a couple of hours of being entertained can matter in the bigger picture.

Baco Noir plays until May 24 at Theatre Orangeville. Tickets, as usual, are at the Box Office at the Town Hall on Broadway; by telephone 519-942-3423 ext 0 and online at www.theatreorangeville.ca