

Stag and Doe: a fabulous frolic at Theatre Orangeville

By Constance Scrafield

With only this weekend left to go, be sure to get tickets for Stag and Doe, on at Theatre Orangeville until Sunday's matinee. Written by Mark Crawford and starring a remarkable cast of six, with director David Nairn and the production's creative and production teams, this play is as perfect a collaboration of the whole as we have ever seen on the Theatre Orangeville stage. Everything comes together to create such a great comedy, with many of the strengths and most of the weaknesses to which humanity is heir. We hooted at much of it and laughed at the rest.

Indeed, there are moments of poignance, as the cast promised us during their pre-show interviews but, maybe, it was just the mood of the evening, we cared and didn't because we were otherwise having so much fun.

So, what is a wedding for? Why does anyone stage a stag and doe? How do the priorities of either stack up when they have to take place in the same space the same date?

When the bride is so stressed over this day she has been planning for years; when the bride-to-be is still in the going-nuts stage over similar preparations; when the corresponding groom and to-be are having to cope with all the feminine angst, who can cry ?stop? and answer some of the foregoing important questions?

Well, perhaps, the maid of honour but, maybe also, the caterer, because he has so many of his own problems with the occasion to deal with.

Stag and Doe is, relatively, a large cast and a very busy play. Emotions run high and low, and everyone is tested to the hilt to make the whole thing work. Some of the scenes are quite remarkable for the continuity they demand and there are no gaps in the flow. This is an extremely well-tuned cast and production for the acting and the on and off stage technical design and execution are spot on.

To be sure, there are reflective and off-beat moments when the fervour and the audience take a breath but, generally, the action is sustained to very good effect, because the comedy never lags; it keeps moving, entertaining and dishing out the unexpected.

When Mandy, the bride of the day in her wonderful dress, arrives to the local community hall with the news that her elaborately arranged garden wedding has been destroyed by nature's elements, she naturally presumes that whatever has been otherwise arranged to happen in the hall will be cancelled or postponed in favour of her own needs.

Much to Mandy's chagrin, Bonnie and her finance, Brad, are determined to stick to their plans of staging their stag and doe, regardless. Tempers and threats fly, but there to negotiate and shuffle the schedules of both to everyone's reluctant agreement is Dee, Bonnie's Maid of Honour. There is another glitch in the ointment of the relationships here which I will let you find out for yourself. Heidi Lynch, as Mandy, does a stunning job of being angry, overwhelmed and, ultimately, drunk, the whole distance by never over doing it, yet maintaining her tension. We never get fed up with her because she balances the emotions so skillfully.

Her almost husband, Rob, well played by Jesse Griffiths, is, by part way through the play, tortured by her eventual imbalance and his other conflicts within the story. Griffiths as Rob keeps it real and wins our sympathy. Whether Rob deserves it or not, you decide.

Like so many men caught in the middle of female-emotion-driven situations, Jeff Hanson beautifully offers us the beleaguered Brad, who thinks he knows and understands his life and his sweetheart, Bonnie, until he realizes he might not altogether.

Delivering those revelations, for better or for worst, Caroline Toal as Bonnie, is both very funny and quite wretched as she struggles with her decisions, trying to make the best of, and to rationalize, all things.

Kudos to Karen Knox as Dee, wounded but saucy, yet still open to temptation. She is smooth and funny; it seems she is speaking her own language, whatever Crawford wrote. She is, really, the unexpected source of reason throughout; the flippant philosopher.

So delightful to watch David Reale, the caterer Jay, schmooze around kitchen like a real pro. Outside the main framework of the day's tensions, he has his own trials to deal with and we laugh again at his dilemmas and his resolutions. Jay works the others to his own advantage but we love him for it.

To tell you that a Daniel Levinson is the fight director, while Jeff Hanson doubles as fight captain, is to give away nothing but to set you up for one of the best choreographed and truly funny action scenes any stage has seen for a long time.

Tickets for Stag and Doe, finishing this Sunday, are available at the Theatre Box Office; by telephone 519-942-3423 and online www.theatreorangeville.ca