

Suddenly Mommy! ? A hyperbole of angst

By Constance Scrafield

Many of us are parents.

Usually, we have had parents. Anne Marie Scheffler, who opened her show, Suddenly Mommy! recently at Theatre Orangeville and which is on until March 6, brings us a hilarious show all about the pitfalls of mommyhood.

Humour is a funny thing; there are lots of components and hyperbole is major amongst them. Scheffler is a champion of hyperbole. Like the comedy of Second City, of which she was a member with the National Tour Company and an understudy with Second City Mainstage, that enjoys and employs over the top exaggeration to great effect, Scheffler too, endures the anguish and the responsibilities of mommyhood for both her birth- and step- children, with wild passion and outrageous suffering.

Nothing she considers by way of the slings and arrows of being a parent are outside the truth; what she does is bring them into focus in a way most of us would dodge ? or, at least, never admit to our own mothers.

The autobiographical angle of this show is Scheffler's own life; that, as a single career woman busy with her life, she met and married a gentleman with one daughter and found herself pregnant right away, and that pregnancy was followed two years later by another, both resulting in sons. From only having to tend to her own needs, she was ?suddenly? seeing to the needs of a family of five in just a few short years. No doubt, writing the show was an outlet for the shock she eventually felt once her youngest was two years old and able to join in on the negotiations of any given situation ? as he is in her show.

Well, we say ?he? but this is a one woman show and Scheffler handles all the roles, including the two-year-old, with admirable deftness. Along with the child, there are her own mother, her dyke friend, her perfect sister, her husband, a previous boyfriend, her four-year-old son, her step daughter, and ? if we have not forgotten anyone else ? Celine Dion.

Scheffler has come home for this production, for she moved to Hockley Valley with her parents, who still live here, when she was only six; went to Banting High School in Alliston during which time, she was crowned Miss Potato. This exhilarating and grand honour led her to write, early in her career, ?Norma Green from Hockley Hills High, where she was crowned Miss Potato four years running.?

?I toured this show (Norma Green) across Canada and into California and that started my career as an actor and a writer,? she said during an opportunity we had for a brief telephone interview while she was still on tour in the U.S.A.

?I am definitely a hands-on mother,? she told us. ?I care about the balance between travelling for my career and being with my family. I want both.? Of coming here, she commented, ?I owe a lot to that part of the world. It gave me a lot of writing ? such fun stories.?

She went to Toronto after her post secondary schooling and ?had a lot of success with television Second City. Writing has been such a big part of my career. An actor who also writes has a lot of advantages.?

Back on stage, the framework for the show is the auditions that she is doing for various parts on a few days off that she has taken from her family. During the story telling within her auditions and to us on the other side of the ?fourth wall,? Scheffler bounces us back and forth between situations within her circle, conversations with the characters in her life and skirting a very entertaining nervous breakdown over it all.

Scheffler and Emmy award winning comic writer, Rosie Shuster, have written a new show, while Shuster has been story consultant for this production. Shuster wrote for the Lily Tomlin Show and was one of the original creators of Saturday Night Live, just to mention a small part of her extensive career.

Suddenly Mommy is full of funny from the outset to the finish and Scheffler is constantly clever and quick throughout the entire performance. Sometimes, it is hard to believe she is on the stage by herself.

Whatever your status relative to parenting, you will appreciate Scheffler's off stage comment, ?When we're together, my boys and I like to go skating ? just being together ? we watch movies. And play Monopoly.?

Suddenly Mommy is playing through to March 6. For tickets, there is the Box Office on Broadway or call, as usual, 519-942-3423 or go online at www.theatreorangeville.ca