

The Game's Afoot provides lots of entertainment at Blackhorse

By Anne Ritchie

Mystery, humor and intrigue abound in Ken Ludwig's *The Game's Afoot*, a riotous play that opens season 43 at Blackhorse Village Players.

The year is 1937, the setting is Broadway at its theatrical peak and the actors, as well as the characters, offer a wealth of talent, imagination and class.

The play unfolds like a Russian nesting doll: a play within the play, with actors transferring the skills found within the characters' roles.

Playing actor William Gillette, Rob Cook surefootedly enacts the detective skills of Sherlock Holmes, particularly when murder takes center stage and the entire cast falls in its shadow. A gunshot gone awry spurs Cook to action, and adopting his version of Holmes, he sets an ingenious scene, complete with secret room and faulty lighting, attempting to discover the wannabe murderer. An equally talented Vince Ursini enacts Holmes' arch rival, Moriarty, as well as Felix, Willy's best friend, a philandering yet devoted husband/lover. It is hilariously obvious that all is not as it seems.

It should come as no surprise that in such a setting, one of the wildest scenes of the play occurs, and columnist Daria (Cheryl Phillips) is just as intriguing whether she is dead or alive. Phillips has the entire cast by their throats, on edge with accusations and innuendo, all which send the audience into gales of laughter. However, the best is yet to come: the contortions of Willy and Felix as they try to stuff Daria in the closet and grapple with Daria in a secret room would be enough reason to send one flying to the Blackhorse box office for tickets.

The mild-mannered Simon (Jordan Baker) seems to know-it-all, but like those Russian dolls, there's a surprising number of traits he masters within the play to endear himself to one and all. Is he truly comforting, or craftily hiding the key to a murder mystery? It could be either, thanks to Baker's versatility in a complicated role.

The female cast members have their own quirks and crannies that merit applause. Is Martha, keeper of the secret room, (Catherine Burns) matron or murderess, Aggie (Victoria Tokarski) lucky in love or money hungry, and Madge (Dorothy Schmauder) all sizzle or all seer? Playing their roles to perfection, they have us guessing until the final scenes. Burns is a mother we would all love to have. Schmauder has a vibrant role, be she doting wife or theatrical star, and as Tokarski portrays a woman with inheritance and potential for more.

It's up to the fervently dedicated detective Goring and wannabe actress (Barb Fairhead) to decide what's what, and she unwittingly upsets each character, tripping into the spotlight of truth. Fairhead makes her debut in a role that has her spontaneously spouting Shakespeare and solving murders almost in the same breath, and her enthusiasm for both is contagious.

The performance is well-played, the applause well-deserved.

The Game's Afoot, and it's not to be missed. For tickets, phone 905-880-5002. The play runs until Nov. 16, and discover the likes of Sherlock Holmes in a murder mystery not to be missed.