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The Weekly News



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MacIvor play probes How It Works and how it breaks

Halifax News Net

By Jon Tattrie – The Weekly News
The Theatre Arts Guild in Halifax is turning to a big-name Nova Scotia talent for its fourth play of the season.

The Pond Playhouse off Purcell's Cove Road is staging Sydney-born Daniel MacIvor's *How It Works* as its second-last play of the season. Set in Halifax, *How It Works* tells the story of Al (Jonathan Tyson), his ex-wife Donna (Deborah Post), his girlfriend Christine (Connie Tremblett) and his drug-addicted daughter Brooke (Beth VanGorder).

The first half of the play shows the mess they're in, and Christine's efforts to fix it, while the second half jumps back in time to show how the characters got so far from the loving family they once were. Michele Moore is making her debut as director.

Moore says TAG selected the play as part of a commitment to celebrate Canadian playwrights. "As soon as I read it, I thought, 'Oh boy, what a play,'" she says.

A Beautiful conflict

TAG planned to open the 2009/10 season with *How It Works*, but then discovered Neptune Theatre was staging MacIvor's *A Beautiful View* in the Studio, so they delayed it to spring. "I think we'll get an audience that will follow MacIvor wherever his plays are showing," Moore says. "To have him living in our time, in our area, is phenomenal."

Moore says it usually it takes a while for actors to go "off book" and for the words to sound natural, but MacIvor's sharp ear for dialogue meant it sounded real from the start.

"You see the positive and the negative aspects of each character, not presented in a judgmental way," she says.

Post says it's a play about broken connections.

"It's full of longing and frustrated desire for communication," she says. "As the mom, I sense that there's something missing. I don't know what it is and I feel guilty about not being able to find out."

VanGorder, who plays 19-year-old Brooke, agrees.

"They both need something from the other person, but there are pieces missing that, as you go through the play, start to fall into place," she says. "(Brooke) is very loving and she wants that core family that has just unravelled over the last three or four years."

VanGorder and Post say some of the best scenes come during the flashbacks to the parents' first date.

"They're hilarious. It's not just a serious, downer drama play," says VanGorder.

"There's an underlying thread of how telling stories is how we heal ourselves."

One-man show

VanGorder got a taste of MacIvor's talent when she was a student at Dalhousie University's theatre program.

Her class was doing a MacIvor play and he agreed to direct what was basically a one-woman show.

On opening night, the one woman lost her voice.

"Daniel came in and played the role," VanGorder says.

"(It wasn't) ha-ha funny, we get to see a guy play Allison. Because the writing was so good, it was absolutely brilliant. People were crying."

They're hoping for a similar reaction to *How It Works*.

"It requires an intelligent cast and it requires an intelligent audience and we've got that in



Beth VanGorder (left) and Deborah Post play a daughter and mother struggling with a failing family in Daniel MacIvor's *How It Works*, at the Pond Playhouse.

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jon@jontattrie.ca



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