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TAG to stage Lill play Corker

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Playwright wrote work about need for inclusion before she was elected to Parliament



Actors Mike Taylor, Chantelle Dooley, Frank MacLean, Will Brewer, Sheila Morrison and Rick Brien rehearse a scene from *Corker* at the Pond Playhouse in Halifax last week. (PETER PARSONS / Staff)
.Lorraine Cantwell loved the Wendy Lill play *Corker* from the first time she read it.

"The play deals with serious issues like love of family," Cantwell says. "It deals with hope. It deals with taking care of each other, with cultural bias about inclusion. It comments on the social system and makes you think.

"It's a very satisfying play. You know the characters. You meet them every day. You understand their choices, see their joys and frustrations.

"You sympathize, empathize or disagree with them."

Corker, first staged in February 1998 by Eastern Front Theatre in Dartmouth, was a finalist for a Governor General's Drama Award in 1999. It is the story of a dysfunctional family and the developmentally challenged young man who tries to attach himself to it.

Dartmouth's Lill, a former Dartmouth MP, and cast members will take part in a question-and-answer session after Sunday's Theatre Arts Guild 2 p.m. show at the Pond Playhouse in Halifax. "We've asked questions of Wendy, who was very forthcoming with helpful ideas," Cantwell says. "She hasn't tried to influence our decisions. We're hoping we're honest and truthful to her original intention."

Corker tells the story of Merit (Chantelle Dooley), a middle-aged, successful career woman with no children; her husband Leonard (Mike Taylor), a lawyer with a fast-track mentality; Merit's mother Florence (Sheila Morrison), a caregiver by nature who takes Corker under her wing; Glenny (Frank MacLean), the social worker who is a foil to Merit; and Gal, short for Galahad, Merit's brother (Rick Brien).

Corker is played by Will Brewer, who has Down syndrome "and is playing the character very well," says Cantwell, noting that this is Brewer's TAG debut and his first serious role.

Lill wrote the play before she was elected to Parliament in 1997 and talked about Corker later that year.

"It's a play I wrote about the growing divide between what I see as the elite and the street," Lill said. "I chose one character I see so many of now — and I hope I don't become one — a very driven female civil servant . . . out there cutting and slashing with all her might for the benefit of the next generation.

"You start to see the dream of the elite unfolding and you come back to the fact we have to take care of one another," Lill said. "It's a funny play, I hope."

Cantwell, who teaches theatre at Halifax West High School and is well-known as an actress with local theatre groups, is making her directorial debut at the Theatre Arts Guild with Corker.

The play is now on at the Pond Playhouse at 6 Parkhill Rd. in Halifax, Wednesdays to Saturdays to March 3 at 8 p.m. each night, with a 2 p.m. show Sunday.

"I've directed a lot in the schools but this is my first time directing adults," says Cantwell, who lives in Timberlea.

"It's a steep learning curve. I'm very comfortable on the acting side but it's a huge responsibility to be a director."

The story begins with a funeral for Merit's sister Serena, a free-spirited type whose death has left Merit, an uptight woman who works with the premier's office, to care for Corker.

"It's very outside of her comfort zone," Cantwell says. "It's a coming-of-age tale of a woman who has been successful and it opens the doors to a reality she has no experience with.

"(The play's) strength is the relationships between characters that are so real, so truthful. It's exciting to watch it unfold. It's not heavy-handed. You watch the characters grow and develop. It's exciting to watch the influence they exert on each other."

Tickets are \$16 for adults and \$13 for students, seniors age 60-plus and TAG members and are available at Ticket Atlantic outlets, online at www.ticketatlantic.com, by phone at 451-1221 or at participating Atlantic Superstore locations.

About the Author »

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