

TA?s A Nice Family Gathering ? A review

By Scott Johnston

There's nothing like an annual holiday get-together to bring out the quirks and highlight the dysfunctional nature in some families.

As you can imagine, this is amplified somewhat when one of the attendees is a ghost.

That's the situation in Theatre Aurora's first show of the 2015-16 season; ?A Nice Family Gathering?.

Set on Thanksgiving, the comedy by playwright Phil Olson has the recently deceased patriarch of a family trying to tell his wife that he loved her, something he neglected to do when he was alive.

Complications arise when each family member arrives for the gathering dealing (badly, of course) with their own personal issues, when the mother can't see or hear her deceased husband, and when she surprises everyone by inviting his former best friend as a date.

There is much physical humour and some good one-liners in this well-acted play, which has enough family stereotypes that you're bound to recognize at least one of the characters from your own family.

Central to the story is the mother, played by Susan Lane. Initially portrayed as a bit scattered, this changes as the play progresses.

Her date, Jerry, is played by Peter Kerenyi. While he has a limited amount of time on stage, you still get a good feel for his personality.

Peter Shipston returns to Theatre Aurora as Michael, the oldest and most successful of the three children. It is a delight watching the cracks appear in the foundation of his seemingly solid world.

Some of these cracks come courtesy of his emotional and over-medicated wife, played by Beverly Sotropa.

The often overlooked daughter, portrayed by Jo-Anne Pulfer, is the family member who may have the news that will have the greatest impact on the family.

The middle son, Carl, played by Paul Payne, is the only one who can see and communicate with his late father, played by Chuck Therrien. Although primarily back to see his wife, the father's relationship with his less-favoured son is nicely developed.

It is interesting to watch the changes in each of the characters, as we come to see that the ones we think have the most flaws may actually be the strongest, and vice versa.

Director Colleen Simm has a great cast to work with and keeps up the pace of this well-written and entertaining show.

As with all good comedies, there is an underlying warmth, and despite our initial impressions, everyone and everything turns out all right.

Evening performances of ?A Nice Family Gathering? continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, October 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, and 31, with a matinee on October 25. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.