

Theatre Aurora goes ?nuts? over Men Are Dogs



By Brock Weir

As a former therapist, the word ?nuts? is not a phrase Peter Kerenyi throws around lightly.

But after 40 years on the other side of the couch, ?Men Are Dogs?, the latest production from Theatre Aurora is was something Mr. Kerenyi could definitely relate to.

?Men Are Dogs?, a comedic play from New York playwright Joe Simonelli, follows Dr. Cecelia Monahan, a psychiatrist running a support group for single and divorced women, all too eager to dispense advice, but more reluctant to look within herself for the release that she needs.

?After 40 years, I could relate to the difficulties therapists have in their own personal lives while, at the same time, trying to be supportive, as Cecilia says, to the nuts,? explains Mr. Kerenyi. ?That isn't a politically correct term in my old job, but I love to say it here because people are crazy ? and I say that affectionately.

?The story drew me because of the main character not being able to deal with loss, her anger, her frustration, and dealing with women who have experienced all sorts of losses in their lives. They are all stuck. One of the things about real-life therapists is it is a lot easier to deal with other people's problems than your own. A lot of therapists put aside their own needs and then quite a few of them go crazy themselves.?

?Men Are Dogs? was not a play Mr. Kerenyi had heard of before leafing through all of Theatre Aurora's options this year, but when the 10-year Theatre Aurora veteran found it, he pursued the director's chair.

Coming into community theatre, he wanted to do away with what production series which trended towards British comedies and operettas. After all, he says, if you have actors running around the stage feigning a British accent and they don't do it perfectly, it just doesn't work.

He takes a leaf out of the books of Hollywood directors of the 1930s like Howard Hawks who specialized in screwball comedies.

?It goes back to my childhood and my fantasies of being an actor in Hollywood,? he says. ?We don't make movies like that anymore and I find them delicious. I can watch Cary Grant every day as an example. My all-time favourite female is Katharine Hepburn. She was a brilliant talent and absolutely gorgeous in the 1930s. If I could travel back in time I would like to be with her all the time."

Unfortunately, Kate and Cary are no longer available, but he has a cast of new and stalwart Theatre Aurora players to make the characters come alive.

Tackling the lead role of Cecilia is Anna Pelc-Draper, a Richmond Hill actress and teacher, who has been involved in Theatre

Aurora for 16 years. The message of perseverance in the play was something which appealed to her when the role came up.

“Cecilia is a character that had a lot of different facets to her,” she says. “She develops, so it becomes a pretty juicy role.”

Also tackling another juicy role is Geeta Bagga, taking on Jane Rudolph, a nurse, she says, who feels “very used” by the men in her life. This is her first play with Theatre Aurora and she has found the whole experience of playing Jane “very liberating.”

“She is very conflicted and also on the borderline of being bisexual,” says Ms. Bagga. “She struggles with her identity in terms of determining if she is going to continue on letting the men in her life slaughter her and make her feel unappreciated. Maybe she wants to gravitate towards the other side and experimenting with that.

“It is about keeping an open mind and how these people experience their encounters and understand these are every day struggles. There is nothing unique about it. It is about people peeling back the onion and pulling at it until you find the problem.”

For some of the characters in this play, the problem itself can be found wearing the pants – namely the two men in the play, one of whom is played by long-time Theatre Aurora veteran Mark Rival. It is a reunion for Mr. Rival with the director, who put him through his paces in his award winning performance as Mitch in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

“The character is a stretch for me personally because he is a bit of a cad, whatever that means. I watch a lot of New York-type shows where the actor is a little bit aggressive, athletic, cocky or arrogant where my regular demeanor as Mark Rival – okay, who am I kidding? I just pull different elements from myself!” he jokes.

“This definitely empowers women. It doesn't necessarily slight men in a negative light, but it makes women a little bit more cautious. It is a comedy, but a reflection of the challenges out there for men and women dating or in relationships.”

“Men Are Dogs” runs on select dates through February 22. For tickets and show information, visit www.theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.