

David Demchuk drama has real Staying power

theatre REVIEWS

By GLENN SUMI

STAY, by David Demchuk, directed by Anne Driscoll, with Caroline Gillis and Mark Harapiak. Presented by White Queen Theatre at Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace (16 Ryerson). Runs to June 6, Tuesday-Saturday at 8 pm, matinee Sunday 2:30 pm. \$7-\$18. 504-7529. Rating: **NNNN**

Good plays don't have to last a lifetime. David Demchuk's two-hander *Stay* packs an emotional punch in a few short scenes.

Mounted a few years ago at the SummerWorks festival, *Stay* tells the story of Joey (Mark Harapiak), a prisoner who receives a stay of execution after being convicted of murdering a child.

Structured as a series of monologues by Joey and his estranged childhood friend Roberta (Caroline Gillis), the work provides glimpses of the two characters' mysterious pasts, subtly hinting at psychological secrets, sins and scars.

There's an unhurried pace to the writing. By withholding details and providing a few well-placed words and images, Demchuk creates tension and captures our curiosity. He can also evoke a sense of place — both geographical and psychological — in a few strokes.

Creates suspense

Director Anne Driscoll helps create suspense without relying on gimmicks, with one exception. Film sequences by Laura Cowell separate each monologue, but they're a bad idea — tedious, vague, completely unnecessary.

Steve Lucas's set suggests two worlds — one a literal prison, the other a metaphoric one on earth — and by the end, these worlds bleed into each other, creating a horrific dreamscape of obsession and fear.

Harapiak, delivering his lines earnestly, has some genuinely creepy moments describing how he connects emotionally with his young victims. But he's also forced to use faux hick grammar spoken in inconspicuously careful cadences.

Gillis's Roberta, on the other hand, is a nervous yet sensible woman haunted by the past who looks uncomprehendingly at the hell that is her present. It's a brilliant performance, quaking with subtext. The talented actor is up for the challenge, and the role allows her to use all the rich, dark, fascinating colours in her emotional palette.

Foster gets Simonized

DRINKING ALONE, by Norm Foster, directed by Eli Lukawitz, with Samuel Owen, Vada Czata, Elaine Martyn, Lisa Messinger and Allan Price. Presented by Tribal Productions at the Ford Centre Studio (5040 Yonge). Runs to May 30, Thursday-Saturday at 8 pm, matinee Sunday 2 pm. \$24, stu/srs \$22. 870-8000. Rating: **NNN**

Neil Simon isn't dead yet. But when the painfully prolific *Odd Couple* author takes his final bow, Canada's Norm Foster will be standing in the wings waiting to be crowned the next King of the



Caroline Gillis is brilliant as a woman haunted by a childhood friendship in David Demchuk's *Stay*.

Lower-Middlebrow Comedy.

That's clear from watching Foster's *Drinking Alone*, a bittersweet show mounted by the energetic emerging theatre company Tribal Productions.

Set somewhere, sometime — I guess being vague increases your chances of getting produced all over the continent — the play opens with a sad-sack bachelor named Joe (Samuel Owen) inviting a naive first-time escort named Renee (Lisa Messinger) into his home.

Dysfunctional reunion

Joe wants Renee to pose as his fiancée so his father — who abandoned the family 15 years earlier — won't think he's a loser when he drops by. Eventually, the stage is set for a dysfunctional family reunion, darkened by the absence of the dead

alcoholic mother and lightened by the wild-card presence of the escort/fiancee.

Remarkably, this sitcom premise is smoothly directed by Eli Lukawitz, who moves the chatty characters around Camellia Koo's naturalistic set with a minimum of fuss. The walls are decorated with empty picture frames, suggesting a lack of family history — a nice touch.

The performances are mostly solid. Owen's Joe and Vada Czata as his sister capture the conflicted feelings of neglected children, while Allan Price breezes through the play as the unjustly accused bad father.

Messinger sparkles in her fresh delivery of nearly every line — sign her up for a sitcom now! — but Elaine Martyn as the stepmother fails to find her character's rhythms.

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THEATRE ALSO OPENING

For complete ticket and showtime information, see theatre listings, page 89.

CHARACTERS AND POEMS REMEMBERED (Arts & Letters Club). Nonnie Griffin presents fun one-person show with characters from plays and poems. May 31. 14 Elm. 597-0223.

THE DOGPATCH, by Chaz Thorne (Jack in the Black). Thorne's multi-character play examines hopes, frustrations and violence in 1948 Halifax. June 2 to 20. Factory Studio Cafe, 125 Bathurst. 504-9971.

DRACULA, by Richard Ouzounian and Marek Norman (Stratford). Bite me. Bram Stoker's gothic classic gets set to music. June 2 to November 7. Avon Theatre, Stratford. 1-800-567-1600.

THE 5TH ANNUAL 'SLAW FESTIVAL (Cabbagetown Theatre). Annual fest of short plays includes works by Mary Claire Thompson, Scott Atkinson, Tom Pickering, Bill Richardson, Nick Mitchell, John Willox and John Guare. May 27 to June 5. Darrell Kent Cultural Centre, 454 Parliament. 921-3406.

FROM NEW YORK TO NORTH YORK... BROADWAY GOES UPTOWN! (Trinity 21). Singing actors recreate moments from famous musicals. May 30. Melrose Park Presbyterian Hall, 250 Fairlawn. 784-0799.

GETTING MARRIED, by George Bernard Shaw (Shaw). Shaw takes unsentimental look at marriage in rarely performed comic gem. May 29 to September 26. Court House Theatre, Niagara-on-the-Lake. 1-800-511-7429.

HANDLE WITH CARE! DO YOU KNOW HOW? (Toronto Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre/Act II Studio). Medicine and art combine in poignant show about breast cancer. June 1 to 3. Robert Gill, 214 College. 978-7986.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND, by Oscar Wilde (Kew Players). Wilde's serious drawing-room comedy about politics, power and love receives community production. May 27 to June 5. Kew Beach United Church, 140 Wineva. 266-7225. 694-4601.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, by William Shakespeare (Stratford). Bard's comedy of love and enchantment receives

another staging. And no Calista Flockhart! June 1 to November 5. Festival Theatre, Stratford. 1-800-567-1600.

REBECCA, by Daphne du Maurier (Shaw). Young bride has serious doubts about fiancé in romantic thriller. May 27 to November 28. Royal George, Niagara-on-the-Lake. 1-800-511-7429.

SCAT IN THE HAT, by Richard Side (International Children's Festival). Side's alter ego, Scat Schrodinger, riffs on consumer culture. May 28 to 30. Lakeside Terrace, 235 Queen's Quay West. 973-4000.

SHE'S THE END OF THE WORLD, by Cesare Casciato (True Era). Dramatic love story set in 1950s Toronto deals with prejudice, crime, ambition and swing dancing. June 2 to 5. Jane Mallett, 27 Front East. 366-7723.

STATEMENT OF MATTER: PERFORMANCE(S) OF INDEFINITE DURATION, by Roddy Hunter (FADO). Scottish performance artist Hunter comments on time, space and territory in 36-hour piece. June 2 to 3. Gallery 1313, 1313 Queen West. 703-5230.

THE TEMPEST, by William Shakespeare (Stratford). William Hutt dons Prospero's robes in Bard's masterpiece about knowledge, power and reconciliation. May 31 to November 7. Festival Theatre, Stratford. 1-800-567-1600.

TORONTO ARTS FOR YOUTH FUNDRAISER (Toronto Arts for Youth/Dufferin Youth Theatre). Martha Burns, Susan Coyne, Ted Dykstra and others take part in fundraising youth performance of Wilder's *Our Town*. May 30. Arts and Letters Club, 14 Elm. 532-1152 ext 27.

WONKY WOO, by Jamie Piekarz (Treehouse TV). Tansy and Rosabelle join Treetownie friends in one-hour show for preschoolers. May 29 to June 27. Young People's Theatre, 165 Front East. 862-2222.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU, by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman (Shaw). Summer fest remounts last season's production of hit screwball comedy about mixed-up family in 1930s New York. May 28 to July 24. Festival Theatre, Niagara-on-the-Lake. 1-800-511-7429.

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