

AND A NIGHTINGALE SANG.

JAN. 17-20
1990
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Arts/Entertainment

Kanata hits nostalgic chord with wartime comedy

Theatre review

... and a Nightingale Sang
Earl of March High School, Kanata
8 p.m. Jan. 17-20

By Sean Upton
Citizen staff writer

Any play that draws its title from a hit song from the era in which it is set promises at least a touch of nostalgia.

... and a Nightingale Sang might hit a nostalgic chord for some but it lacks the innocence normally associated with blissful reminiscences.

It is the latest production by Kanata Theatre and it opened Wednesday at Earl of March High School.

It is a comedy based on the story of how the life of a Catholic family evolved in wartime England as told by the eldest daughter of the working class Stott family.

The title is drawn from the popular song A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square and that title is also given to the play's last scene.

Helen Stott (Jennifer Haynes) is the central figure in the story of how the lives of the members of her family evolve through the course of the war.

She is preparing for life as a

spinster when she meets a soldier who eventually woos her.

The play begins in 1939 when Helen lives with her parents, George and Peggy Stott (Tony Mitchelson and Margaret Jardine), her younger sister Joyce (Annmarie Copple) and her irascible grandfather (Ron Maslin).

Her mother is the religious guide of the family who struggles to keep her children close to their faith.

Her father is a factory worker who seldom becomes involved in his family's problems and who blocks them out by playing the piano.

The grandfather, who has long ago strayed from the teachings of the church, is self-absorbed and only awakens from his own obsessions to poke fun at his children and grandchildren.

The play's best jokes all come from the mouth of the man that the young people consider an old fool but his wit cut deep into their nonsense.

The entire play uses only one set for both acts. The design is simple but serves well for a variety of locations.

The sound effects and lighting were well designed to convey the atmosphere of the war, including a scene in which the family are huddled in a bomb shelter during an air raid.

Jennifer Haynes does a good job in the lead role, a tough job because it includes soliloquies in which she narrates the story. The whole cast deserves ap-

plause for being able to keep up the tricky Manchester accent. The play is funny throughout although the script includes difficult subjects such as sex, religion,

adultery and death. The war is only a backdrop for evolution of the lives of the family but its progress seems to parallel developments in within the

family. As Manchester crumbles from German bombs, so do some of the values that the family had held so dear.

War time play technically complex

By Jim Holmes

A technical tour de force by Kanata Theatre opens this week.

Kanata Theatre's production of C.P. Taylor's "And a Nightingale Sang" is one of the most technically complex productions in the company's 21 year old history.

More than 80 lighting cues and about 50 sound cues help keep the production running. The action ranges over the six year period of the Second World War, and Phil Copple's five level set serves a multitude of locations in and about wartime Manchester.

The challenges for sound technicians Carolle Allard and Barry Kirk and lighting designers Bill Williams and Al Quirt include the staging of a full scale air raid complete with bombs and sirens. Many of the lighting changes come in rapid sequences and require a sure hand on the switches.

"In many ways, this piece plays like a movie," says director Brooke Keneford. "Of course the object is to make the technical business as unobtrusive as possible so that the wonderful, touching and funny story of this eccentric family can come out."

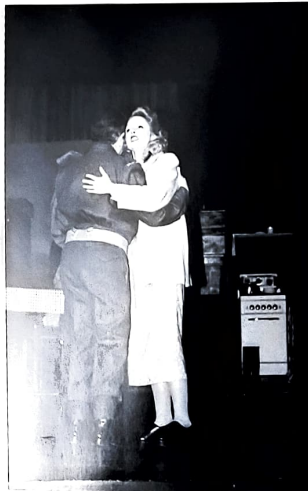
Music plays a large role in this play. Audiences will hear snatches of almost a dozen vintage songs from the war years.

"And a Nightingale Sang" runs Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday this week, Jan. 17-21 in the Earl of March Theatre. For ticket information call 592-1715.



Barry Calger and Jennifer Haines rehearse a scene from Kanata Theatre's current production of And a Nightingale Sang, which opens tonight at the Earl of March Auditorium and continues until Saturday. For ticket information, call 592-1715.

photo by Marcus Fajnszt



ON THE TOWN

Theatre Review

Strong performances bolster moving WW II drama

By Amanda Gibbs

and a rightingale sang presents a humorous albeit bleak picture of World War Two England. The play, performed last week

by the Kanata Theatre, examines the absurdities of war in the same breath as the absurdities of familial relations. And it serves up a powerful combination of both.

The story is told through the eyes of Helen Stott, the aging daughter of a working class family in Manchester. Through a mingling of dialogue and narration, she tries to explain events in her household as its members grasp for something to believe in, something to ground them in their frightening world.

Helen's stalwart Catholic mother, Mam, looks increasingly to the church and her statue of the Virgin Mary for guidance.

Her father, George, on the other hand, seeks solace and support in music, a Communist party membership and party rhetoric.

"There is a bitter-sweet feel to this play...an underlying sense of sadness and fear."

Joyce, her blowzy sister, looks for salvation in an ill-fated marriage to a soldier in the hopes of becoming a martyred widow to the call of wartime.

And 'the old soldier,' as her grandfather Andie is known, clings to the company of animals over people after suffering through the experience of the first world war. He rejects objects of faith or hope, instead he sticks to analysing the bodily functions which distinguish humans from stonies.

Helen herself becomes involved in a wartime romance with a married soldier. This relationship

promises to free her from the banalities of her family life. The affair, however, is fated to end when the war ends.

There is a bittersweet feel to this play. The writing is at times hilarious and yet there remains an underlying sense of sadness and fear.

Perhaps the best example of this combination occurs during the course of a "bombing scene." The family huddles in a bomb shelter as an air raid roars around them. In the tension of the moment, they begin to bicker amongst themselves.

The grandfather worries because the baby respirator he has secured for his cat, in the event of a gas attack, has been left in the house. This is both a laughable and frightening moment for an audience as the truths of war and a crazy situation are revealed side by side and are brought into clearer focus.

The performers managed to sustain accents throughout the play, which as a whole was paced well and acted particularly well.

Jennifer Haynes as Helen was completely believable as the vulnerable, observant woman who comes into her own during the war. She gave a performance with sub-

tle shifts of mood and expression and presented us with a character free from affectation.

Margaret Jardine as Peggy Stott or Mam was also believable as the character who rather enjoys attending her sister's funeral and wearing her pious heart on her sleeve.

The old soldier as played by Ron Maslin, is a character who seems almost detached from the action in the play. He sits back, watches and comments sardonically on what takes place within his family. Consequently, he gets most of the best lines of the play. Maslin gave a good performance as the old collier and creates a sense of helplessness the character must have felt at being caught in another war.

Tony Mitchelson and Anamarie Copple gave warm and funny performances as George and Joyce Stott. Barry Caiger and Robert Johnstone were also laudable as the two uniformed suitors to the young Stott women.

Under the direction of Brooke Keneford, the play was one of the best by the Kanata Theatre. The players gave a good script, rife with pathos and black comedy, a very good reading.

