

THEATRE REVIEW

Kanata audience enjoys slapstick of time-travel mystery

Six cast members all perform well

BY BRUCE DEACHMAN

If death is one of the two verities of life, the fact that we only ever die once is a further refinement of that verity. It's a grand theme that has been dealt with, dramatically, by the likes of everyone from Shakespeare to Moliere to Gene Rodenberry and the crew of the *USS Enterprise*.

In *Communicating Doors*, which opened Wednesday night at the Kanata Theatre, prolific British playwright Alan Ayckbourn (56 plays so far and just 61) challenges some natural

and comic what-ifs of time travel and subsequent historical rejigging, in a very literal race against the clock to avert a pair of decades-old murders. Phoebe (played by Tania Carriere) is a dominatrix prostitute (a "sexual specialist," claims the woman, who also answers to the name Poupée Desir), in the year 2014, is called to Room 647 of London's Regal Hotel.

Here, she discovers a couple of murders. The first is that her so-called mother, Reece (Brooke Keneford), was responsible for the deaths of his first

two wives. The second is that the connecting door between Room 647 and the adjacent room (in Britain they're known as communicating doors), cleverly constructed for the play on a lazy-susan type of turntable, takes her somewhere else altogether.

It takes her back 20 years, when, in the same hotel room, she is confronted by Reece's second wife, Ruella (Jennifer Haynes), who is due to make a forced swan dive from the suite's sixth-floor balcony that very night.

Through the same door, Ruella is able to venture back 20 years herself, where Reece and his first wife, Jessica (Julia Desjardins), unaware of the fate awaiting her, are spending their wedding night.

Hampered by Reece's nasty business partner, Julian (Martin Weedon), and the hotel's officious security, Harold (Jon Alkan), Phoebe and Ruella navigate their way back and forth across the scores of years, as they try to find a way to trick the fates.

The result is a constantly changing "reality" as alterations to past events impact future ones, and as the possibility of being in two different places and times at once becomes more believable.

The production, directed by Rosemary Keneford, kept the sellout opening-night crowd alternately stymied

and entertained for 2½ hours, as couples and families very nearly huddled in their seats or in the lobby at intermission, discussing the possible scenarios with a speculative enthusiasm unmatched since JR fell in Dallas. Aside from a few jittery startups on some lines, all six cast members performed well; Keneford was laudable as the two Reeces, and Alkan's never-ending house detective was a wonderful display of gormlessness, rubbing us wrong in all the right places.

Bill Williams's set design was entire-ly convincing, down to the mini-bar and bland hotel walls. Where better to stage a time-travel play than in a hotel, one of the few places that might not change an iota over 40 years?

Some might find *Communicating Doors*, as I did, a tad slapstick. It is, after all, a farce, and definitely an acquired taste. It works well with the physical comedy of dragging bodies and such, but can't deliver the awe and wonder of conquering the impossible, replacing it instead with an offhanded "Oh, well" attitude. It also makes the script heavy-handed and over-the-top, reaching too far for more hilarity.

Judging by the frequent and wholehearted laughter Wednesday, though, that is the dissent of a very small minority.

Communicating Doors continues tonight and tomorrow, and again from next Tuesday through Saturday, at The Ron Maslin Playhouse, 1 Ron Maslin Way, Kanata. Tickets for the 8 p.m. shows are available from the box office, at 831-4435.

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