

Sparks fly in Hare's intense and smart Hour

British playwright marries personal and political

Jo Ledingham, Vancouver Courier

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THE VERTICAL HOUR

At the Jericho Arts Centre until Dec. 6

Tickets: 604.224.8007

www.unitedplayers.com



Actors Graham Bullen, Claire Lindsey and Daniel Martin perfectly interpret David Hare's penetrating story in the drama The Vertical Hour, now on at the Jericho Arts Centre.

Written by British playwright David Hare, *The Vertical Hour* does superbly what I love best: it marries the political and the personal in a way that sends sparks flying off both fronts. The night I attended, the audience was all eyes, all ears, all minds intensely riveted on the play. This is my kind of play.

And, once again, it's semi-professional United Players under Artistic Director Andree Karas that has scooped the main stages in mounting the Vancouver premiere of a show that opened just three years ago on Broadway.

Hare gives us five intelligent, articulate characters, one of whom (Dennis, played by Sebastien Archibald) appears briefly at the beginning and another (Terri, portrayed by Marlene Ginader) who appears briefly at the end. Defending their term papers that are at odds with their war correspondent turned Yale political science professor Nadia Blye (Claire Lindsay), these two students serve as prisms through which we view Nadia.

Consultant to the White House on the war in Iraq, Nadia supports military intervention. Oliver (Graham Bullen), the father of her English boyfriend, is opposed and deplors the death toll and the devastation. He was opposed from the beginning partly because, as he says, "I knew who the surgeon was going to be, so I had a fair idea what the operation would look like."

Philip (Daniel Martin), Oliver's son and Nadia's young, physical therapist boyfriend, is cute, seemingly uncomplicated, apolitical and very aware of the intelligent, sexually attractive prize he has scored. And it is probably pride in this conquest that finds Nadia and Philip flying from America to Shropshire to visit Oliver, a retired, well-respected doctor and notorious womanizer. The sexual tension of the triangle begins the moment Philip and Nadia arrive.

Into this mix Hare throws cultural differences between Americans and Brits; generational differences (Oliver grew up during the free-loving '60s while Nadia thinks the '60s' sexual adventuring was simply an excuse for sleeping around); and the difference between taking a stand or beating a retreat which is what both Oliver and Nadia have, in effect, done: he lives alone in the country near the Welsh border while she has traded the rough and tumble of war reporting for the safety of academia.

It's not just Hare's penetrating script that makes this production so scintillating. Under Tamara McCarthy's direction, Bullen, Lindsay and Martin are completely in the moment and we are there with them every step of the way. Lindsay is both brittle and fragile; she's also sexy in a quick, sharp way. Bullen is suave, persuasive and slightly predatory while Martin is cuddly, sort of sweet, sometimes petulant.

Hare gets us thinking about our own multi-faceted selves when his characters speak of the people they are "underneath" --their so-called "hidden selves", hidden even from themselves. Martin seems to be a what you see is what you get character but that's not true, either. There's an angry child in there.

The phrase "the vertical hour" comes from military medical parlance referring to the critical nature of the first 60 minutes after trauma; it's the hour during which the course of events can be significantly changed. The evening on Oliver's patio is such a time; none of the characters will escape unaltered.

The Vertical Hour is theatre that engages the mind and the heart. There's enough intelligence in both script and performance to last you right through the warm fuzzy shows on offer throughout the Christmas season.

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