



PERFECT SUMMERTIME FUN

“Performers shine in Maggie’s Getting Married at Festival Antigonish.”

REVIEW BY Andrea Nemetz - The Chronicle Herald, Halifax NS

Sibling rivalry has been around since Cain and Abel.

In the Norm Foster comedy *Maggie’s Getting Married*, which opened Thursday at Festival Antigonish, shy, younger sister Maggie isn’t murderous, but the stress of living in the shadow of the vivacious Wanda is driving her to smoke, if not to drink.

Francine Deschepper is the bewitching Wanda who stole all Maggie’s boyfriends in high school. “I only remember three,” Wanda says, when earnest, virtuous Maggie, subtly played by Festival Antigonish veteran Genevieve Steele, recalls the betrayal. To which Maggie responds there were only three, puzzling Wanda, who recalls bringing home three in a single night.

While Wanda may be self-centred and fully aware of her own attractiveness, she’s also aware of Maggie’s smarts and shy prettiness and is genuinely happy that her little sister is getting married.

And Maggie genuinely admires Wanda, with her success as a real estate agent and her prowess with men. “I haven’t had that many since I moved, only five,” demurs Wanda. “In less than a year,” retorts Maggie. “I’m selective. I just select more often,” shrugs Wanda, with her trademark winning sass.

The latest of these is Axel, portrayed with a nonchalant swagger by Christian Murray as one of those men who never really seems to grow up. He’s an actor, with a shockingly bad blond dye job, black leather jacket, T-shirt and jeans, and a rather too-pronounced soul patch. It’s appropriate he’s playing Peter Pan in a re-imagining of the classic children’s story, which sees the leader of the Lost Boys as an adult film star or Peter Porn, as mother Cass refers to him in one of her many witty one-liners.

Cass Duncan, in yet another perfect comic turn by Shelley Thompson, clearly rules the roost in the Duncan family. Husband Tom, portrayed by Thompson’s real-life husband Ed Thomason, shows real affection for his wife, even as he tries to gently persuade her to turn some of her vast reserves of energy to him.

Maggie obediently follows her every command — and allowed Cass to set her up with fiancé Russell, played by Jeremy Webb in a rare turn as the comic foil, instead of comedian.



Even Wanda behaves herself, mostly, in mom’s presence.

At the root of their relationship — and the heart of the play — is the love all the characters feel for each other. Even the outsiders, Axel and Russell, bask in the glow of the love. And it’s that love that draws us into the fairly conventional romantic comedy — as usual, the path of true love does not run smoothly — and keeps us longing to know how it will all turn out.

The characters are not one-dimensional caricatures, but are multi-layered human beings. While Axel could be shallow, he’s a deep thinker with intensely held beliefs about the place of God in one’s life and surprisingly less confident than the swagger would suggest. Cass truly wants the best for her family and for Russell, who she brought into the fold.

For example, she arranges for Maggie to get her hair done by her Aunt Doris at 7 a.m. on her wedding day so she’ll have time to get it professionally fixed afterwards, so no one’s feelings are hurt.

Wanda is not just a man-hungry vixen and Maggie is self-aware, with the courage of her convictions.

The performers all shine in the swift-moving comedy, directed by Jean Morpurgo, and runs about an hour and 45 minutes, with intermission. Thomason, with his stalwart, gentle, funny Tom, could be everyone’s favourite dad, and with Thompson, gets some of the evening’s biggest laughs.

It’s a heartwarming and funny show, though not as gut busting as the season opener, *The Mating Game*, but perfect light-hearted summertime entertainment.

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