

MATING GAME IS SPLENDID

“...in the hands of a quintet of talented Nova Scotia actors, it’s hilarious.”

REVIEW BY Andrea Nemetz - The Chronicle Herald, Halifax NS

Sometimes in a relationship, everything comes together in just the right way, creating magic. That’s the case with the Festival Antigoniish season-opening production of *The Mating Game*.

It’s a well-written romantic comedy by actor-playwright Robin Hawdon in the popular British bedroom farce style. And in the hands of a quintet of talented Nova Scotia actors, it’s hilarious.

Christian Murray is television talk-show host Draycott Harris — the toast of the town, always surrounded by a bevy of beautiful women at the hottest events.

He returns to his penthouse apartment with one of them — the hot-trot Honey Tookes (Francine Deschepper) — and just as the big moment is about to happen, he discovers an interloper in his bed — his brother James (Jeremy Webb), returned from seven years in Australia.

Not about to let the opportunity for romance disappear, Drake frantically tries to juggle Honey and James with the help of some revolving set pieces. (In this futuristic apartment, a bar turns into an office with a touch of a button, and a bookcase opens to become a spare room on which a bed is set up on a Ping-Pong table.)

Stumbling into the mayhem is meddlesome Mrs. Finney, deftly played by Shelley Thompson. With a drunkard of a husband and five kids, she’s worldly and wise-cracking, with a love of gossip.

Alas for Draycott, it turns out not to be the night of his dreams, though he does have a cracking good time drinking Australian Schnapps with his brother. Swallowing the “rocket fuel” allows Murray, who co-founded Jest in Time Theatre, to show off his considerable physical comedy skills and gives his character an abominable hangover. Which is the condition his horrified, buttoned-up secretary Julia Carrington (Genevieve Steele) finds him in the next morning after the studio reports him missing.

As in all good romantic comedies, Julia is in love with Draycott, which is obvious to everyone but the man himself.

And as in all good romantic comedies, the end of the story may be obvious to everyone, but it’s the journey that matters. The road to the resolution in *The Mating Game* is filled with gut-busting laughs and exemplary comic timing.



Christian Murray & Genevieve Steele

The actors are all well-cast. Murray is a likable Draycott, who delights in his celebrity rather than taking it for granted or letting it swell his head. Steele is believable as the capable career woman who can’t reveal the depths of her attraction, and her vulnerability is touching when she finally reveals her feelings.

Deschepper doesn’t let her lusty, man-eating character become a brainless bimbo, despite her obvious sex appeal, imbuing Honey with intelligence, confidence and an innate ability to manipulate the male of the species.

But it is Webb who steals the show at every turn, always ready with a perfect arched eyebrow, charmingly bewildered expression or ideal one-liner. The role of James seems to have been written for him, and the audience can’t get enough of his comedic portrayal.

The Mating Game, at two hours 15 minutes with an intermission, runs at the Bauer Theatre at St. Francis Xavier University till Aug. 27, in repertory with the thriller *Sleuth*, beginning Wednesday, and the Norm Foster comedy *Maggie’s Getting Married*, starting Aug. 4.

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