

SLEUTH ACTORS SUPERB

“...an intellectual, teasing tangle...clever writing...masterful acting.”

REVIEW BY Elissa Barnard - The Chronicle Herald, Halifax NS

Running into actor Ed Thomason at the Superstore, he seems to be a friendly, everyday guy pushing a grocery cart. Two hours later, though, he's transformed into a cold, arrogant, pathetic and dangerous man — the notorious Andrew Wyke in Anthony Shaffer's Tony Award-winning thriller, *Sleuth*, playing at Festival Antigonish.

Thomason brings all of his intensity and intellectual prowess to this games-player and, luckily for the audience, is evenly matched by Jeremy Webb, returning to Festival Antigonish after spending last summer with *Shakespeare by the Sea*. Both British, these two accomplished actors know the class references that are an undercurrent in *Sleuth* better than the audience does, and are comfortable with this British form of dense, talky, character-driven drama.

The play has an extraordinary plot premise that I overheard a theatre-goer say she couldn't believe despite the marvellous acting.

Andrew is a successful detective novelist living in supreme confidence in his Wiltshire manor. He invites Milo Tindle, who is having an affair with his wife, Marguerite, over one evening for drinks. Andrew preys on Milo's mixed ancestry, lower-class education and need for money to convince him to steal jewelry from the house to raise money for a future life with high-maintenance Marguerite. When Milo agrees, the trap is set.

This cat-and-mouse game with both characters struggling for the upper hand had me and my seat-mate jumping twice at surprise gunshots. Apart from the fun in seeing how the tricks are played out, *Sleuth* is very engaging in its clever writing and amazing spill of language, largely from the erudite Andrew. Thomason is frenzied and dazzling as Andrew narrates and plays various possible scenarios drawing on his extensive knowledge of detective fiction.

Sleuth is an actor's play. The 1972 movie, written by Shaffer, starred Laurence Olivier as Andrew and Michael Caine as Milo. The 2007 movie, written by Harold Pinter, starred Caine as Andrew and Jude Law as Milo.

The play demands extremely rapid and clear articulation, nuances of expression and a kind of pacing, prowling physicality that director Robert Metcalfe ensures.

There are two amazing pieces of acting — when Andrew reveals his true savage nature and snarls a spew of hostile though well-phrased invective at



Jeremy Webb & Ed Thomason

Milo, and when Webb's character pulls his own trick in a fantastic physical and verbal transformation into a kind of British equivalent of Lt. Columbo.

Sleuth, first performed in 1970, has a very authentic, richly detailed design by Ian Pygott.

Andrew sits smugly in his study with high, dark wood walls and shelves filled with knick knacks and Scotch bottles. Overstuffed chairs sit on a Persian carpet. Game boxes are under the desk, with Wyke's favourite ancient game of Senate carefully set up on a side table.

Jennifer Coe's costumes are thoroughly conceived, from the famous clown suit to Milo's orange shirt, in comparison with Andrew's more regal red and blue shirts.

Sleuth is an intellectual, teasing tangle that requires and rewards close attention with its clever writing and plot twists, as well as, in this production, masterful acting.

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