

FESTIVAL ANTIGONISH

'a highly entertaining evening out'

Relatively Speaking: first-rate fare

By Andrea Nemetz • Halifax Herald • July 24, 2005

When you're in love, you want to trust your partner.

And when you're blindly, madly, head over heels in love, you're willing to accept extremely far-fetched excuses for what seems to be unreasonably bad behaviour because you want to believe so badly.

But there's that nagging voice in your head. The one that wonders about the mysterious telephone hang-ups. The cryptic letters. The trips on which you are unwelcome.

These doubts, along with a set of credible coincidences, and comic misunderstandings come together to make *Relatively Speaking* an **extremely satisfying summertime frolic**.

First produced in 1967, the relationship comedy was **popular British playwright Alan Ayckbourn's first hit**.

And, as directed by Festival Antigonish artistic producer Ed Thomason, it skips merrily along from one witty line to the next with **first-rate performances** from Mark Uhre, Raquel Duffy and Margot Sampson, all starring in Festival Antigonish's *Joni Mitchell: River*, as well as Hugo Dann, who trained at the Old Vic Theatre School in Bristol, England, and is making his Festival Antigonish debut.

Set in London and Buckinghamshire, England, in the late 1960s, the play opens in the funky flat of hip young Greg (Uhre) and Ginny (Duffy) who, with their clever banter and casual yet constant touching, are clearly madly in love.

Greg, already slightly jealous - the lovely Ginny is a first-class flirt evidently used to the attentions of a large number of admirers - is woken by two hang-ups. He attempts to satisfy his curiosity about the calls, the large numbers of expensive bouquets of flowers, and a strangely too large pair of slippers he finds under the bed. There's also the questions brought on by the scribbled address on a pack of cigarettes and enough glitzy boxes of chocolate to fill Willy Wonka's factory - not to mention that Ginny's on a diet.

Though fast on her feet, Ginny comes up with only marginally satisfying answers, which Greg accepts with obvious reservations. But when she announces she is visiting her parents and Greg can't come because her parents are uncomfortable with guests dropping in, the naive lad has had enough and decides to surprise her at The Willows, the expensive-sounding address he found on the cigarette box.

Meanwhile, at The Willows, comfortably middle-class, middle-aged couple Philip (Dann) and Sheila (Sampson) are in the midst of one of the routine days born of a long, contented relationship - gardening, tea on the patio, reading the newspaper, avoiding church because of a dislike of the guest minister.

Sheila toys with Philip, dropping remarks into the conversation suggesting a secret, perhaps younger, admirer, while vehemently denying the existence of any such fellow.



Raquel Duffy and Hugo Dann (Photo: Marjorie MacHattie)

When Greg arrives (thinking he's at Ginny's parents) much confusion ensues, only to be exacerbated by the appearance of Ginny and several cases of mistaken identity.

The **stellar acting** - along with Ayckbourn's spot-on relationship observations in the form of **wickedly clever dialogue** - make the show **a highly entertaining evening out**.

Sampson gives a **standout performance** as a sort of Camilla clone - with her upper-class breeding and British manners taking precedence over any emotion. Uhre is at once **touching and funny** with his oft-bewildered expressions - an endearing geek in the manner of Topher Grace in *That '70s Show* or Adam Brody as Seth Cohen on *The O.C.* Duffy makes the manipulative Ginny **lovable and sympathetic**, while Dann displays a range of **realistic emotions** and a surprisingly nasty streak when crossed.

While the tendency with British farces is to go over-the-top, Thomason makes sure that doesn't happen here - there's no screaming, slamming doors or outsize antics, merely grown-ups in humorous situations.

The costumes, by Denyse Karn effortlessly evoke the '60s and mention must be made of the lightning quick scene changes that drew **enthusiastic clapping from the audience**.

Relatively Speaking runs in the Bauer Theatre, Antigonish, to Aug. 21.

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