

Theatre Orangeville opens new season with pair of comedies

'Love or Nothing: A Double Bill' to run at the Opera House from Oct. 15 to Nov. 1, featuring two one-act plays

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Theatre Orangeville is opening its 33rd mainstage season with something audiences at the local theatre are not used to seeing ? two distinct plays sharing the stage in a single evening.

Love or Nothing: A Double Bill runs from Oct. 15 to Nov. 1 and pairs two one-act comedies by Canadian playwright Stewart Lemoine.

Rather than following the traditional two-act format, the production will feature Love is for Poor People, starring Emma Grabinsky, followed by Or You Could Do Nothing, starring Ron Pederson.

Both are solo performances built around characters looking back on their lives, but each approaches that reflection from a different perspective.

Pederson said that the plays combine comedy, imagination and elements of absurdism while gradually revealing more about their central characters as their stories unfold.

'I think Stewart Lemoine's plays are pretty singular,' he said. 'They're different from anybody else's plays. They're comedies - literate comedies. They're sort of fantastical and absurdist. I mean that in the best way. Often absurdist theatre is kind of existential, but this is sort of more hopeful. It's its own world. They're solo pieces, one actor in each, and they're tricky to talk about because they're so full of mystery. The whole story is about the unfolding, and there's lots of surprise and variety in both of them.'

Love is for Poor People follows a glamorous and outspoken woman reflecting on the trajectory of an eventful life, including her career, relationships and experiences.

Grabinsky prepared for the role partly by reading autobiographies from larger-than-life entertainers including Liza Minnelli, Tallulah Bankhead and Carrie Fisher as she developed the perspective of a similarly eccentric character.

The second half, Or You Could Do Nothing, introduces Owen Fyfe, a man with an unusually large home and an ability to recognize potential in people who may not see it in themselves. He opens his home to a collection of people searching for direction, with those relationships eventually leading Owen toward discoveries about his own life and family.

While the stories and characters differ, the two plays are connected by their focus on positivity, imagination and human connection.

Music also runs through both stories, while the characters share an ability to reshape the way they understand their lives and the people around them. Love is for Poor People leans toward a faster and more eccentric comedy, while Or You Could Do Nothing takes a more reflective and philosophical approach.

Grabinsky said that these plays are designed to directly appeal to the audience and allow audience members to see themselves in the characters on stage.

'I think a big part of the plays is connecting with the audience and not being afraid of the audience,' she said. 'I think people who are watching this play are going to walk away feeling like they have been in a friend's living room. It feels intimate. It feels really

close in the way that I hope that we're moving towards in theatre in Canada.?

?Sometimes you walk away from a play and think that was amazing, but I don't really know who it's for. This play, people are going to walk away and they're going to go, ?That's for me. They said that to me. They were connecting with me,' and personally, that makes working on these plays a joyful process,? Grabinsky added.

The double bill also marks a first for Theatre Orangeville.

Artistic director Jennifer Stewart was introduced to several of Lemoine's works through Pederson and saw an opportunity to bring a Canadian playwright whose work has not been widely produced in Ontario in recent years back before audiences.

?I'd read a few Stewart Lemoine plays that Ron had given me, and I just thought it was a new, fresh voice that we haven't seen in Ontario in a really long time,? she said. ?He had some productions at Factory Theatre in Toronto, but that was in the '80s. So I thought, here's another untapped Canadian playwright, because that's our mandate. I'm always trying to find new voices, or voices we haven't heard in a while.?

Looking for a companion piece that could create a full evening, Stewart approached Lemoine, who provided several possibilities. Love is for Poor People was ultimately selected for the contrast between its central character and Owen while maintaining themes that allow the two stories to complement each other.

The unusual format has also created a different production process.

With only one performer on stage during each play, rehearsals have been divided between Grabinsky and Pederson. The two productions must also share a single set, designed by Theatre Orangeville production manager Becky Morris, that can serve both stories without requiring a major transformation during intermission.

Opening Theatre Orangeville's ?Season of Discovery,? the production centres on two characters discovering themselves through reflection and their relationships with others.

The minimalist nature of the solo performances also leaves space for audiences to use their own imagination to fill in the people, places and experiences described on stage.

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