

Theatre Orangeville's Common Ground: a fun blast from the past



Written By Joshua Drakes

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Theatre Orangeville's production of *Common Ground* offers audiences a warm, character-driven story that balances heartbreak with classic 80s flair and humour.

The play is a joy from start to finish, full of the positivity and vibrant energy that Theatre Orangeville is known for.

The play follows Pam, a woman reeling after her husband unexpectedly leaves her, and Jake, the husband of the woman her spouse has run off with.

What initially begins as an awkward, reluctant meeting between two people bound by shared betrayal gradually evolves into an honest connection, as both characters confront loss, loneliness, and the possibility of moving forward.

The more Pam and Jake meet, the more their innate chemistry becomes apparent to the audience. It starts small, simply two people who gave everything to their significant others only to get hurt, and it starts to become something more.

Jake shows he remembers the little details of Pam's house, such as the flowers present when he first came by. Later, they both realize they have the same priorities, such as working and being focus-driven.

Further still, their conversations reveal just how much they have in common, and with some extra pushing from Lizzy, Pam's best friend, the two get even closer. But just how close? You'll have to watch to find out.

The story unfolds with gentle wit, allowing moments of pain and comedy to sit comfortably side by side. It's an 80s drama that will partly remind audiences of classic sitcoms like *Full House* or *Seinfeld*.

One of the production's strongest elements is the chemistry between the actors.

Pam's somewhat uptight, workaholic, do-good nature plays well off Jake's country-boy, straight-shooter attitude, and both are consistently foiled by Lizzy's chaotic and unpredictable presence, which always seems to push the two closer together. Their performances feel natural and unforced, creating a humorous yet endearing dynamic that anchors the entire play.

The actors work seamlessly together on stage, reacting authentically to one another and drawing the audience into the emotional undercurrent of the story.

Conversations flow with an easy rhythm, and awkward moments feel natural and believable. Moments of silence are just as effective as the dialogue, often necessary to let the audience laugh. This sense of connection makes the characters' evolving relationship feel earned rather than rushed, despite time skips throughout the story.

Of course, those performances depend on a strong script, and *Common Ground* delivers that as well. The play takes a pretty big narrative risk right at the start by thrusting the audience into a story of heartbreak without actually showing it unfold.

We read the breakup letter alongside Pam as she processes it, and that's all we get. If that opening moment doesn't land, the audience won't be emotionally invested in the story, which will then build on its aftermath.

Thankfully, it absolutely landed.

Pam's reaction captures the shock, confusion, and despair that accompany a breakup like this. The first act firmly establishes the tone of the play, keeping the air light and humorous despite the emotional weight, a balance that isn't easy to achieve.

This was something Theatre Orangeville's artistic director, Jennifer Stewart, was clearly mindful of, and the extra care paid off. At no point did the shifts from sadness to laughter feel out of place or unnatural. It was messy, chaotic, but painfully believable.

The production does a fantastic job of telling a story about finding new meaning and motivation after tragedy, padding its tougher lessons with well-placed humour.

The nostalgia of the 1980s, complete with period fashion and language, brought many audience members back to a younger, fun-filled time. Throughout the show, people could be heard singing along to the 80s soundtrack and pointing to outfits they once wore themselves.

The set design further enhances that feeling, fully embracing the play's distinctly 1980s atmosphere.

Bright splashes of colour dominate the stage, immediately placing the audience in the era without needing explanation. Small details, like the iconic glass block panels that defined 80s architecture, add that extra character to set the stage. The design is bold without being distracting, supporting the action rather than overwhelming it.

Ultimately, *Common Ground* stands out for its refreshing sense of positivity.

While it begins with loss, the play resists cynicism, choosing instead to project empathy, humour, and hope. In a landscape where darker narratives often dominate, its optimism feels both sincere and very welcome.

The production is fun, heartfelt and nostalgic, and a must-see for fans of Theatre Orangeville.