

Lewiston theater's 'Halfway There' goes the distance with depth, humor

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The Public Theatre's production about four friends in a small Nova Scotia town is 'laugh-out-loud funny' while delivering a message of hope and perseverance.

Somewhere between the equator and the North Pole, exactly halfway there in fact, is the small town of Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. It is the setting of The Public Theatre's current comedy, "Halfway There," and a destination sure to offer both great humor and heart-felt lessons on overcoming life's challenges.

Directed by Janet Mitchko, "Halfway There" tells the story of four best friends in a small town as they navigate life, love and, perhaps most importantly, friendship. The laughs are nonstop. The jokes are naughty, to say the least, but certainly not offensive. The acting is superb. And the comedic timing spot on.

Set in a diner where the four women meet for coffee each week, "Halfway There" is the story of Rita, Vi, Mary Ellen and Janine, four women who grew up in Stewiacke, and Sean, a visiting doctor from Toronto. (And we learn right away that the four friends "don't like people from Toronto.")

The title of the play has meaning beyond the geographical location of the town. Each character is at a turning point in their life, halfway there perhaps, on their journey to their individual destiny.

Janine, played by Rebecca Tucker, is the youngest of the four women and a waitress at the diner. She has seen the world and chosen to return to her hometown, leaving a successful career to return to Stewiacke and work as a waitress. When asked why, she replies: "I've seen what's out there, which is why I came back here." Tucker convincingly portrays Janine as sweet and kind-hearted, but also bold and assertive when the situation calls for it.

Heather Dilly plays Mary Ellen, the wife and mother who is taken for granted by her family and depends on her friends to help her feel valued. When she finally stands up for herself, things take an exciting and unexpected turn. Dilly's acting is superb. She portrays Mary Ellen with sensitivity and a ton of humor. Her timing is perfect and she has the audience in stitches with her ability to shift from timid to brazen while remaining true to her character.

Rita, played by Laurie Carter Rose, comes across as tough, uninhibited and maybe even a little wild. As we get to know her, we find unexpected depth shaped by a tragic past. Rose plays the character to perfection with sensitivity, depth and just the right amount of humor. She has the audience both laughing out loud and wiping tears, especially when we start to see the vulnerability beneath the tough exterior.

Rounding out the friend group is direct, no-nonsense Vi, played by Nikki Ferry. Vi is the levelheaded and blunt member of the group. She was just proposed to by her longtime boyfriend and has turned him down, deciding that marriage is not necessary to be happy. She loves her friends and is generous with helpful advice, sometimes a



The Public Theatre's production of Norm Foster's "Halfway There" centers around four friends in a small Nova Scotia town who meet weekly at a local diner. Above, Rebecca Tucker as Janine, Heather Dilly as Mary Ellen, Nikki Ferry as Vi, and Laurie Carter Rose as Rita share a moment as they support each other through life's challenges

little too much. Ferry's acting is spot on as she captures the kindness, vulnerability and even toughness of Vi perfectly.

Lastly, we have Sean, the handsome visiting doctor from Toronto. Played by Gil Brady, Sean has come to Stewiacke to fill in for the town doctor for a month, and also to recover from a broken heart. Brady is both charming, funny and genuine in his portrayal of the doctor. His vulnerability comes through as he pursues Janine persistently, yet respectfully. As he bonds with the women, they finally begin to realize that maybe people from Toronto aren't so bad after all.

The Public Theatre, with its professional casts, has a reputation for portraying sensitive topics with humor and feeling. This production is no exception.

The play, by prolific Canadian playwright Norm Foster, whose "Lunenburg" was staged at Public Theatre last year, is laugh-out-loud funny. But it is also laced with underlying themes of love, tragic loss, loneliness and heartbreak, along with the immeasurable value of friendship. It delivers a message of hope and perseverance, reminding us that joy is found in the ordinary and, as we face changes and challenges, it's the connections we make that make it all worthwhile.