



Previews and Reviews by Jeniva Berger

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The Drawer Boy



Brampton's **Rose Theatre** has programmed an impressive summer season which kicked off with the rarely seen comedy thriller *The 39 Steps* followed by *A Chorus Line*. I caught up with the mid-summer production of Michael Healey's multi-award winning play **The Drawer Boy** directed by **Scott Lale**, in the Rose's Studio Theatre, a space that turned out to be perfect for Healey's intimate play which featured an impressive country kitchen set by **Vaughn Davis** and **Mike Rainey's** lighting that made you yearn for sun drenched days and nights where you could count the stars.

The Drawer Boy takes place in the area of Clinton in south western Ontario, and is based on the experiences one actor had while researching the 1972 collective creation produced by Theatre Passe Muraille called *The Farm Show*. Collective creations pioneered by Passe Muraille's Paul Thompson, featured a unique presentation style where the actors themselves created the plays from their own experiences. Collective creations were some of the best

things that came out of Canadian Theatre in the 1970's.

Playwright Michael Healey wasn't a member of the acting team that put *The Farm Show* together way back when, but learned about the farmers' experiences when he was an actor at The Blyth Festival in 1998. From that came the inspiration for **The Drawer Boy** - and to bring it all full circle, **Miles Potter**, who directed the premiere of **The Drawer Boy**, certainly knew the territory having been a member of the acting team that put together the original Farm Show.

All of this is made clear in **The Drawer Boy** as Miles (**Andy Ingram**), a young actor from Toronto, walks into a farm house in rural Ontario and brashly enquires whether he can stay there and learn all about farming for a show his theatre company is putting together. Morgan, the man who runs the farm (**Dan Karpenchuk**) has a keen sense of humor especially when it comes to Miles' naiveté about anything connected to the reality of a farmer's life. "So for 30 years you've been doing this," says Miles gearing up for a dramatic recitation, "planting, nurturing, nourishing, building up; then harvesting, reaping, destroying, eviscerating. How does that make you feel?" Morgan manages a wry smile before his barely contained even tempered retort, "Miles, it's an emotional roller coaster."

It's hard to imagine why Miles just doesn't catch on, but **Andy Ingram**, who gives the character more theatricality than is necessary, and less sensitivity than he might, manages to uncover more information than he bargained for. Morgan is at first cooperative, but gradually becomes more and more protective of his house mate Angus (**Rod Ceballos**), who suffered a severe head injury during the Second World War, and with his childlike mind can no longer recall his past life or even recent conversations. It is Morgan who tells him highly edited stories at night about his past life, gives him his medicine when his head hurts, and tries to insure that he isn't exposed to awkward questions from Miles.

Of course it doesn't work. Healey has built his drama around Miles' constant probing. And so Miles becomes a friend to Angus at the same time he keeps asking questions, wondering about Angus' injury, Angus' gift for numbers and mathematics, and the two tall girls who are now buried "on the hill." And when Angus finally is able to partially lift himself out of his prism of disjointed memories, enough to take a tentative place in a world he once knew better, it is a victory.

The crux of the drama comes when Angus can totally accept his and Morgan's life portrayed onstage (the actual Farm Show was actually workshopped for the Clinton farmers) in front of their friends and neighbors, and Morgan is not. The half-truths and embroidered stories that Morgan has been telling Angus through the years are finally admitted, and through the men's reconciliation comes respect. Ceballos and Karpenchuk both seem to live in the skins of their characters and there isn't a step that's out of place. Healey's play is quiet and personal, and Scott Lale's sure handed direction follows its high and low peaks with sensitivity. **The Drawer Boy**, besides being a fine play, is perfect summer entertainment. **The Drawer Boy plays at the Rose Theatre Studio until August 27. 1 Theatre Lane, Brampton, Ontario. All tickets can be purchased online at www.rosetheatre.ca or through the Box Office by calling 905.874.2800.**

Photo: by Aron Goss. L to R: Rod Ceballos as Angus, Andry Ingram as Miles.

(Reviewed by Jeniva Berger)