

Holy Moly – They're married, not to each other and – they are doing WHAT at The Segal?

Enter Stage Left

SHARMAN YARNELL



Most of us have seen the movie version starring Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn. The movie that made people sit up and pay attention to the fact that, yes, there are couples in marriages that do stray, even if only once a year.

Whilst not a huge fan of the American comedy genre, I have to admit that the movie was fun and raised a few questions in my mind. Nothing like a movie that leaves you laughing, feeling good but asking questions. Such as, are there really people who live like this! And what if you do find someone else you enjoy being with? Is this the way to deal with it? But...wait a minute...perhaps it is the mystery and anticipation of the yearly tryst that keeps this couple interested in each other! Perhaps that's what is missing in each of their marriages - anticipation of the unknown. But, I digress.

The movie is *Same Time Next Year* and it is based on the stage play of the same name written by Canadian playwright, Bernard Slade. (He also wrote *The Flying Nun* and *The Partridge Family*.) *Same Time Next Year* clearly took Slade to an entirely different level in writing. It opened on Broadway in 1975, with Ellen Burstyn and Charles Grodin in the leads and went on to be nominated for Tony Award for Best Play and won the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New American Play. Ellen Burstyn won both the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play and The Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress in Play. Charles Grodin was nominated for the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actor in a Play, and Gene Saks for the Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Director of a Play.

It opened to rave reviews - New York Times critic, Clive Barnes, called it "...the funniest comedy about love and adultery to come Broadway's way in years." The play ran for nearly 1500 performances.

Put simply, the two-hander about a secret tryst that carries on from 1951 to 1974, did pretty well. And over the

years the Broadway production had some rather stellar actors in the roles of Doris (a housewife) and George (a neurotic accountant).

Cast replacements included: Sandy Dennis, Hope Lange, Betsy Palmer, Loretta Swit as Doris and Ted Bessell, Don Murray and Monte Markham as George.

What makes this adventure in adultery different from any other play written on the same topic is the fact that the same two people meet up with each other every year for 24 years. Both are married to other people. Neither, though, comes across as promiscuous. We follow the couple through the changing times - they grow, develop, they have children (with their spouses), they talk about life altering moments in their lives. Through Doris in particular, we see the rise of the feminist movement with her change of fashions and attitudes.

We begin to wonder, had they met prior to marrying their spouses, would they not have been the perfect couple?

George: *You always could see through me, couldn't you?*

Doris: *But that's okay, because... I've always loved what I've seen.*

As RH Thompson put it in my recent interview for Showtime with him, "It is an intricate gem of a play".

He knows, because he is playing George in The Segal Centre production of *Same Time Next Year* alongside Michelle Giroux as Doris. The play is directed by Diana LeBlanc, who also directed Thompson in *Harvey* at The Segal a couple of years ago. He lauded LeBlanc for her sense of humour and her ability to allow an actor to 'run' with creativity. (LeBlanc will also be directing the upcoming musical of *Guys and Dolls* at The Segal.)

He marvelled at the construction of the play: "It is so well conceived...to watch people changing, eras changing, to watch a long term love affair and to watch their



R.H. Thompson and Michelle Giroux are brilliant in *Same Time Next Year* now playing at The Segal

deepening relationship... It's a very tight, funny and dense play".

Thompson, an activist for Arts and Culture, recently finished playing Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (an activist in his own right). Whilst here in Montreal, he has visited with students to talk to them about how important the Arts in any form are to our well-being, emotionally and physically. "You have to ignite in every generation, enough people to understand there must be intelligence, activism, diligence and good articulation as to why the Arts are there and why we must support the Arts".

This is, indeed, one of those plays that will leave you laughing but also, perhaps, a tad pensive about what might have been in your life. Brilliantly cast as George, Thompson is long, lanky and ever so much looking like an accountant. In taking on Thompson, LeBlanc and *Same Time Next Year*, The Segal has snared the brass ring in its merry-go-round of exhibiting some of the best Theatre Montreal has to offer.

Same Time Next Year is playing at The Segal Theatre until May 20. For tickets call: 514-739-7944 or online at www.segalcentre.org

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