

East Side Players' Quartet offers a snapshot of life

Final production of the season onstage at the Papermill Theatre



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By Maria Tzavaras

Coming to terms with aging and the ever-evolving changes that go along with it can be challenging, especially when you are living in a retirement residence surrounded by people who are just like you.

In East Side Players final show of the season, *Quartet* by Ronald Harwood, four seniors share their reality with humour and honesty in a realistic show about living your golden years with a combination of grace and frustration, denial and acceptance. Set in the beautifully constructed home for retired singers and musicians, somewhere in England, three former opera stars, Cissy (Malorie Mandolidis) Wilf (Daryn DeWalt) and Reggie (Robert Ouellette) pass their days doing activities like reading, enjoying the garden and socializing (and Wilf also makes inappropriate sexual jokes to anyone who will listen).

Because they sung together at one point, thankfully, the trio have each other. It's clear they have a history, and it doesn't take long to hear them reliving their glory days, and comparing them to the reality they face now.

Regardless, the trio seem content, that is, until a new arrival comes to live at the home; the fourth person in their former opera quartet, and Reggie's ex-wife, Jean (Jane Hunter). This turns Reggie upside-down, despite the divorce being more than 30 years ago. Add to that, Jean is not the happiest person, likening her situation to prison and lamenting that she is there on "charity."

Each year at the home they celebrate the birthday of the late great composer, Giuseppe Verdi, with a gala. The quartet have been asked to sing their famous *Rigoletto* for the gala finale, and despite it being decades since they have appeared on stage, Cissy, Wilf and Reggie think it's a great idea.

Jean, however, needs some convincing due to severe insecurities about her current life, versus her former self. They come up with a unique compromise, and agree to close the gala, but it isn't without it's bumps and hilarities leading up to the big night.

This show is a wonderful slice-of-life story that's relatable regardless of what stage of life you're trying to navigate. The characters' attitudes and feelings are universal, as change inevitably affects us all, and continues to do so throughout our lives.

Mandolidis gives a flawless, funny and heartfelt performance in her role as Cissy. She makes her character both likeable, and with a touch of vulnerability, and despite her situation, she's positive and enthusiastic about life.

Hunter portrays Jean in a realist and honest way, with the right combination of wit and bitterness that everyone feels at points in their lives when the memory of their former life overshadows today's reality.

The tension and dynamic between her and Ouellette as Reggie are some of the most honest in the play. Ouellette plays Reggie amazingly well, and his poise and sense of humour, combined with his compassionate nature, adds a great depth and humour to the show.

DeWalt's portrayal of the "dirty old man that really isn't," Wilf, is the comedic star of the show. He delivers classic and hilarious one-liners, and his honest pessimism and observations, evident in his mannerisms, his delivery and facial expressions, are fun to hear and watch.

As honest as some of the realities are for these eccentric characters, at the core, this show is an enjoyable snapshot about coming to terms with what was and what never will be again, and enjoying the moment with the people you love.

Quartet runs from May 28 to 31 and June 3 to 6 at 8 p.m., at the Papermill Theatre, 67 Pottery Rd. General admission tickets are \$22. For tickets, please call the box office at 416-425-0197 or visit www.eastsideplayers.ca