

Absent Friends

Jan
91



ABSENT FRIENDS

an
ALAN AYCKBOURN
comedy directed by
SALLY RANEY

CAST

(in order of appearance)

DIANA	Gwen Knight
EVELYN	Merle Nicholds
MARGE	Betty Francis
PAUL	Lionel King
JOHN	Tony Mitchelson
COLIN	Peter Jefferson
BABY WAYNE	Alessandra Hollands

The action of the play passes in the English, suburban home of Diana and Paul. An autumn afternoon.

Act 1: Saturday 3 pm
Act 2: Saturday 4:15 pm

There will be one intermission during which bar and refreshment services are available in the foyer.

PRODUCTION STAFF

DIRECTOR	Sally Raney
PRODUCER	Margaret Jardine
SET DESIGN	Earl McLaughlin
SET CONSTRUCTION	Earl McLaughlin, Tony Bryant, Tony Francis, David Gladwin, Ted Mauger, Bill Williams,
SET PAINTING	Ben Tolley, Christine Barrington, Margrit Cattell, Julie Drake, Wendy Higgins, Geoff Holland, Glen Hussey, Bob Knight, Tom Kobolak, Mary Mauger, Anne Williams
STAGE MANAGER	Rosie Keneford
ASST. STAGE MANAGER	Dorothy Beak
LIGHTING	Bill Williams
SOUND	Brooke Keneford
COSTUMES	Dorothy Gardner
FURNISHINGS	Iva Farmer
PROPERTIES	Heather Moses
CONTINUITY	Marilyn Crabtree
MAKE-UP	Gwendy Tolley, Carol Allard, Eufron Williams
FRONT OF HOUSE	Anne Holland, Anne Marwood
PUBLICITY	Annmarie Copple, Jenefer Haynes
PHOTOGRAPHS	Mary Mauger, Ted Mauger
BOX OFFICE	Jim Holmes
	Marcus Fajrajai
	Alan Quirt, Sandy Quirt

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Arts/Entertainment

Kanata production lacking momentum

By Joanne Laucius
Citizen staff writer

The problem with Kanata Theatre's production of *Absent Friends* is that it can't decide whether to be British or not.

In the end, it's not British enough.

Absent Friends is Kanata Theatre's fifth attempt at a play by much-produced playwright Alan Ayckbourn. It's a comedy about a group of friends who gather for tea a few weeks after the drowning death of a friend's fiancée, whom none of the friends has ever met.

Each character is preoccupied with his own worries, and friction between the characters soon starts to simmer on stage. And that's one of the production's greatest faults — it's simmering when it should be boiling.

That's where the production's essential Britishness — or lack of it — comes in.

Absent Friends, like many plays about Britons, revolves around the British unselfconscious primness and what happens when cracks start to show. The Kanata Theatre production just never gets around to establishing that vulnerable composure.

Much to the consternation of the tea party, the bereaved cheerfully passes out snapshots of the deceased. "I like that handbag," says the brazen Evelyn, glancing through the photos.

"I would hate to drown," says Marge. "You look so awful afterwards."

The British accents of the actors, with a few notable exceptions, was and wane. Others are virtually non-existent.

Take the line: "Just don't make

Theatre review

Absent Friends
Kanata Theatre
Earl of March High School
4 The Parkway, Kanata
Jan. 16-19, 8 p.m.

daft noises at him. He doesn't like that.

Spoken in flat North American English, some of the humor is si-phoned out of a line that the audience wants so desperately to hear as "Don't myke dauf noises aht'im. 'E dussn't lyike thauf."

Ayckbourn's text is good, but demanding. The play's rhythms demand that reserve should crumble into frenzy on a few occasions, but the pacing in the Kanata production never seems to quite catch the necessary momentum at the right points.

Merle Nicholds, who makes her first appearance with Kanata Theatre, doesn't seem to grasp the great comedic potential of her role, the sullen and sluttish Evelyn, and often almost throws away the best lines in the play.

Nicholds' monosyllabic responses to questions from the other characters are wooden, and don't explore the real range possible for those grunted "Yes" and "No" replies.

Gwen Knight as Diana fares a little better, but her upper-crust accent slips after a few minutes on stage, makes a brave comeback in other spots, but never seems strong enough.

The strongest performances of the evening come from Betty Francis as the shopaholic Marge whose pet name for her husband is "dum-dums" and Peter Jefferson as the befuddled bereaved Colin.

Sense of 'orchestrated chaos' highlights Absent Friends

This week when Kanata Theatre stages Alan Ayckbourn's comedy, *Absent Friends*, it will be the fifth Ayckbourn play the company has done.

This is not surprising. Ayckbourn has been described as the most successful living playwright. His output is staggering. Although barely 50 years of age he has written more than 40 plays, revues, and similar stage related entertainments.

But this is only part of the story. Some of his

works, like *The Norman Conquests*, *Confusions*, *Aburd Person Singular*, and *Inimate Exchanges* are complex, multilayered structures. *The Norman Conquests*, for example, is really three self-contained plays, featuring the same people at the same house over the same weekend.

Two of those plays have been done by Kanata Theatre, *Round and Round the Garden* and *Living Together*. *Inimate Exchanges* is really the equivalent of six full length plays involving



Betty Francis in a scene from Alan Ayckbourn's comedy about a tea party gone awry, *Kanata's Theatre's production opens this Wednesday at the Earl of March auditorium.*

Photo By Marcus Fajrai

three major and several minor characters all played by one actor and one actress. And yet in spite of this output he is regarded as one of the world's most complete men of the theatre, combining as he does his career as a playwright with those of a successful director and actor.

Kanata Theatre has chosen one of his earlier plays for its January production. Uncharacteristically, there are no technical high links

in *Absent Friends*. Ayckbourn gives us a straight forward situation — a consolatory tea party thrown for Colin by his former friends after the death by drowning of Colin's fiancée.

Stage time matches real time. There is a single set. What is impressive theatrically is the way Ayckbourn develops an atmosphere of orchestrated chaos out of what is meant to be a ritual of decorum and politeness.

















