

[STAGE]

LIVE

OFFICE HOURS

by Norm Foster
 April 11-12, 18-19 w/dinner
 April 10, show only
 WEST PLAINS
 UNITED CHURCH
 549 Plains Road, West
 Burlington
 905.381.1441
 thealdershotplayers.com

THE ALDERSHOT PLAYERS (TAP) call themselves “the Golden Horseshoe’s Longest Running Dinner Theatre,” and it is clear why. Quite simply, they offer crowd-pleasing fare all around with comfort food and comfort theatre. *Office Hours*, by Canadian mainstay Norm Foster, does not aim to elevate or teach us anything about human relationships, but rather to make us laugh calories off from our roast beef (vegetarian option available) dinners.

A success, Foster’s script is structured within six vignettes, each taking place in a different office on the same Friday afternoon. While there are some common characters and elements, each is essentially a stand-alone skit. Some raise themes that properly belong in a work environment — a disgruntled reporter dissatisfied by being relegated to human interest stories, or the classic “artistic integrity vs. financial success” battle, played out in *Office Hours* as a well-known but washed out director pitches a very recognizable film idea. Other episodes tread the familiar ground of family and relationship woes, and just happen to take place in someone’s office.

The setting and stories are merely vehicles to deliver the jokes, which are plentiful in this play. The humour is effective

but broad. Like much of Foster’s work, it is fairly reminiscent of situation comedies. While it does the job to get you chuckling, you won’t exactly say ‘you couldn’t see it coming.’ That said, the audience at the West Plains United Church were completely tickled on opening night.

Director Rozz Woodcock has assembled a fine cast of seven talented actors who each play two or three roles. They are all clearly com-

mitted to their characters and have a ball onstage, which proves infectious and is fun to watch. Mel Staley brings either a sharp edge or a soft touch, whichever is called for in a scene. Peter Gruner’s hardluck, everyman appeal carries him through two characters. Ash Hunter becomes thoroughly despicable in his all-too-brief appearances onstage (the characters, not the actor). Scott Broe, also the play’s producer, has a winning casual charm. Bev Mattson handles her “straight man” role well, but really shines as an overbearing mother. John Oleg Krawchenko steals the three scenes he graces. And Bruno Chiovitti brings a tremendous energy to the final two scenes of the show.

Woodcock has crafted a feel for the show that matches the script well; it’s big, brassy and leaves no banana peel untrod. This is what Foster’s work often demands, and TAP delivered. While I felt there were moments when the pace could be tighter, overall Woodcock kept her six scenes and seven players clipping along very nicely.

With limited stage space, TAP has done impressive work with the set. Woodcock and company have done an excellent job constructing an all-purpose office space using bold colours, abstract art and large windows. The set functions as a television network, film executives’ office, where a psychiatrist treats patients, and several other locations, and handles all these tasks very well.

Office Hours makes good on its promise of raucous comedy. It may not be the most enlightening piece of theatre in town, but if hearty laughs after a hearty meal sound like a good night out to you, then catch the spring show from the Aldershot Players. See if you like: Any other Norm Foster play, sitcoms, comical suicides. Don’t see if you don’t like: broad comedy, the Toronto skyline, high-waisted pants. **V**

[JEFF SANTA BARBARA]

