

Northumberland Players' 'The Cemetery Club' filled with humanity, humour

The cast masterfully juggles raw grief with sharp and impeccably timed humour, writes guest columnist Kristin Andrews

By **Kristin Andrews** Northumberland News

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Northumberland Players' 'The Cemetery Club' production plays at Firehall Theatre until June 11, 2023. - Honor Sylvester photo

There comes a time in all our lives when we are forced to learn how to navigate grief, loss and the gut-wrenching decision to close one chapter in order to begin a new one — hopefully, all with some grace and a little laughter.

The Northumberland Players does just that with writer and producer Ivan Menchell's play, "The Cemetery Club."

Director Carol Beauchamp and first-time producer Rebecca Rennicks bring to life the often-unpredictable emotional range of grief, the healing power of friendship, and the struggle to embrace love after loss. As Beauchamp says in her program notes: "What I love about this play is its humanity and humour as it tackles our

need for love, friendship, human contact, and sexuality as we age. It challenges our perceptions, values, and misconceptions, but it also gives us hope that we can move forward.”

Set in the mid-1990s, three Jewish widows in their fifties/sixties, who are lifelong friends, meet every month for tea before visiting their husbands’ graves. Ida (Nancy Gallagher), Lucille (Siobhan Kenny) and Doris (Sheilah Currie) are united in loss, but a balance of quick-witted humour and emotion illustrate the different stages and processes of their individual grief.

Sam, the local butcher (Jeremy Brans), meets the trio in the cemetery while visiting his wife’s grave and sparks begin to fly between him and Ida. Lucille and Doris meddle in the romance in an attempt to protect their friend’s heart as Ida discovers the dating game doesn’t get any easier with age or experience.

The cast masterfully juggles raw grief with sharp and impeccably timed humour — each getting their moment to show the layers and complications of how we cope with loss. Watch out for Mildred (Elizabeth Payne) as she enters the mix.

The set creatively flips between Ida’s living room and a Jewish cemetery in Forest Hills, Queens. The lighting paired with instrumental music help set the tone for each scene in this dramatic comedy. It’s impossible to mention all the names of the amazing volunteers who dedicate their time to create the set, props, lighting, costumes, makeup and sound — all of which bring the production to life and are perfectly executed — bravo!

The play is a poignant reminder of the power of a support system, that laughter is the best medicine and that when it comes to grief, the only way out is through.

The production plays at the Firehall Theatre in Cobourg and runs until June 11. General admission tickets are \$25. To learn more, visit www.nplay.ca.

Kristin Andrews is a Port Hope resident and former journalist. The opportunity to write reviews for the Northumberland Players is a torch that has been passed along from her longtime journalism mentor and dear friend Selena Forsyth.