

Gary Smith, Hamilton Spectator, Sat Mar 26 2011

For This Moment Alone, think and feel



Tanja Jacobs, Neil Foster and Hardee T. Lineham in For This Moment Alone. Roy Timm Photography

Marcia Kash's new play, *For This Moment Alone*, is an intriguing piece of theatre. How much you like it, however, may well depend on how willing you are to listen, feel and think.

As far as I'm concerned, a new Canadian play is reason to rejoice. And when it's one that has serious things to say about life, love, guilt and redemption, it's even more reason to toss your hat in the air.

So, even if there are some dark threads stitching this well-acted, tautly directed play into a compelling and unified whole, I still suggest you go see it.

You won't walk away unscarred by its frank and forthright look at a Jewish family trying to survive in Toronto in 1948. There are reminders here that Canada wasn't always a kind and understanding place for Jews even in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

The thing is though, Kash avoids any notion of making her play a polemic. Thankfully too, she allows humour to strengthen her story, to give it a human context and a moving undertow that takes it away from unrelieved sadness and pain.

Based on a true story from Kash's family history, the play veers off in its own direction. It tugs us with it as it not only attempts to resolve a mystery, but allows for release from pain and revivification of the human spirit.

We are in an apartment above a fruit and vegetable store on Toronto's College Street. Joe, played with strength and resolution by Hardee T. Lineham, his friend Sol, a flinty Neil Foster, and Joe's sister Bertha,

a warm, yet crusty, woman, played splendidly by Tanja Jacobs are anxious. Along with Joe's niece, Ruth, a sometimes too emotionally distraught Tal Gottfried, and Norman, Joe's sensitive young son, played with warmth and gentle passion by Aaron Stern, they await Freddie Goldfarb. Ruth's brother, he has survived Auschwitz and two years in a Displaced Persons Camp after the end of the war.

I don't think it's giving too much away to tell you Freddie is not the man they thought him to be.

Where the play goes from here is what gives it its great heart and spirit.

There's plenty of prickly thought in Kash's engaging drama, enough to keep you riveted for just over two hours. There's also warmth and wisdom that lessens the anguish of the play's frightening conclusion. Let's just say there are revelations that make you understand the length a human being will go to survive the impossible.

Director Sarah Garton Stanley anchors Kash's work in reality at the same time as designer Patrick Clark gives it a brilliant sense of the surreal. Think Edward Hopper.

Clark's apartment is one of the most revealing stage sets I've seen in years. Everything is heightened, yet real. The window is huge, a metaphor for escape. Doors are larger than they would be in real life. Walls are see-through, like curtains that shroud mystery yet occasionally reveal truth.

Maria Vaccratsis pops in and out of this cocoonlike world creating comic connection with reality.

At the centre of Kash's play is Ian Lake's contained and disturbed Freddie. He's so haunted by horror we can see it in his eyes. Along with Tanja Jacobs and Hardee T. Lineham he is the strength of this fine acting ensemble.

My only quibble is with Kash's character Ruth, whose shifts of mood are too sudden and not always well supported in the text.

If there's a theatre god, *For This Moment Alone* will have a life beyond this production in regional theatre. And that's how it should be.

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for The Hamilton Spectator for more than 30 years.

Need to know

What: For This Moment Alone

Who: Theatre Aquarius

Where: Dofasco Centre for the Arts, 190 King William St.

When: Now through April 10

Tickets: 905-522-PLAY