

Go With the Flow

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11/24/2010 8:00 AM

The Memory of Water sticks with you

Something struck me as I was watching *The Memory of Water*, on now at Langham Court. On top of this being a very solid production, it also highlights the vast difference between a modern play about women written by a woman—*Water* was penned in 1996 by British playwright Shelagh Stephenson—and a dated play about women written by a man, à la Langham's last offering, Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple, Female Version*.

The premise is simple: three sisters gather in their hometown when their mother, Vi (Elizabeth Brimacombe), dies after a long struggle with Alzheimer's. Eldest sister Teresa (Melissa Blank), long married to husband Frank (Rob Cruse), is overbearing and resentful that she had had to take care of mom all these years, while middle daughter Mary (Lorene Cammiade) is a work-obsessed doctor having an affair with a married man, Mike (Mur Meadows). Wild child baby sister Catherine (Odile Nelson) has a flair for the dramatic and a weakness for men and smoking joints. But beyond the inevitable sibling squabbling that erupts, we begin to learn about the past, present and future of this family now that their matriarch has passed.

Stephenson's script won the Laurence Olivier award for best comedy, and it shows; there's a wonderfully dry British sensibility about the whole thing, with lots of well-timed jokes that help break up the tense moments. Brimacombe's turn as the now-deceased mom, who shows up to chat with Mary post-mortem, was a bit stiff on the Wednesday preview, but she'll probably loosen up as the run goes on. Highlights were Blank's Teresa—who plays a brilliant, hilarious drunk in one scene—and Cruse as rational realist Frank. All in all, the cast did a wonderful job with this snappy script. Kudos to director Angela Henry for keeping things engaging, despite the entire play taking place in one bedroom. My only criticism is there could be some trimming, especially in the first act; while the exposition near the beginning does give us some character development, it could have been pared back to cut down on the two hour-plus run time.

The Memory of Water is the kind of play that Langham Court can do very, very well. A sharp script that touches both the funny bone and the heart cockles, paired with a well-rounded cast and good production values, makes for a hit that will please loyal Langham audiences as well as folks who just like a good play.