

# Commie Spies in *A Pack of Lies*

**A Pack of Lies**  
Northern Lights  
til February 15

review by Alex Shetsen

A living room, a kitchen, and a foyer. Stairs in the back leading to the second floor, somewhere. Mid-twentieth century furnishings. In short, everything the paragon of middle-class respectability.

Living in these surroundings are Bob and Barbara Jackson (Warren Gravesand, Jane Logie), a very proper and faintly bourgeois British couple, in the year 1960. They have a teenage public school daughter, Julie (Kate Newby). Living across the street from the Jacksons are their closest friends, Helen and Peter Kroger (Elam Ross Gibson and Wendell Smith), who claim to be expatriate Canadians. Peter is a rather intellectual book dealer; Helen is a typical overbearing-but-friendly North American wife.

Those are the set and the characters of *A Pack of Lies*, a Northern Lights production now playing at the Kaasa Theatre in the Jubilee Auditorium. The play is supposedly a spy thriller based on a real-life case a quarter century ago. In reality, it is nothing more than a domestic play whose main point is a moral question.

Into the mishap-filled, but essentially happy, lives of the Jacksons appears Mr. Stewart (Jeremy Dix Hart), an investigator from Scotland Yard. He is tracking a KGB spy. Horror of horrors, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson soon find out that sheltering this spy are none other than their dearest friends the Krogers.

Stewart insists that the Jacksons allow the police to keep surveillance on the Krogers from their house. And so, for the next several months, MI5 agents (Anne McGrath and Donna Call) are a constant part of their lives.

The surveillance quickly begins to pose great moral dilemmas to the Jacksons. Should they tell the Krogers (their closest friends, after all) that they are being tracked by MI5? Complicating matters is Stewart's insistence



Middle class respectability is challenged.

photo Paul Menzies

that Julie be kept in the dark about the real reason that there are MI5 investigators about the house. Still worse, Julie is particularly close to the Krogers. How will she react when she inevitably finds out that Helen and Peter are communist collaborators?

In the end, the pressure becomes too much for Barbara. As the events creep to their inescapable conclusion, her health begins to fail.

Thus, the whole of the play revolves

around the basic question: "Would you spy on your neighbours for the good of your country and the end of your friendship?" Or, even more essentially, "When is a lie not a lie? To what extent is it proper to lie?"

To stretch the question out over nearly three hours is, however, slightly heavy-handed. The single-mindedness of the theme begins to bore, and one finds oneself checking one's watch towards the end.

What would save this play considerably is a

quicker pace. For while the acting is generally quite good, with Gibson Hart (as Stewart) especially standing out, the occasional long pauses between dialogue quickly begin to annoy.

In the end, it is a shame that the play becomes a victim of its own slow pace. *A Pack of Lies* does raise a valid moral point. However, if anything, that point is driven home too well; we get no relief from it throughout the play.

## Love For Love is funny, sexy, and moving

**Love For Love**  
Studio Theatre  
Run ends this Saturday

Review by Elaine Ostry

"Love For Love", claims David William, "is funny, sexy, and very moving."

Mr. William is the director of this play, performed by Studio Theatre, which runs from Thursday, January 29 to Saturday, February 7, at Corbett Hall. William is a visiting director from London, England. Although he has worked as a member of a theatre company many times in the past, he now prefers to work as a freelance director. William has directed fifteen productions in Canada; later this year he will direct Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* at Stratford Theatre in Ontario. William has received international acclaim as a director of both theatrical and operatic productions. He is an

Mr. William is impressed by Edmonton, noting its growing theatre community. "And if this graduating class [of the BFA Drama program] is any indication, the future of theatre in Edmonton, and the rest of Canada, is very promising." He was pleased with the artistic standard of the actors: "They are well-taught; they have enormous promise, are delightful to work with, very intelligent, receptive."

The scale of the production surprises Mr. William. *Love For Love*, he states, is technically a big production with much work and money invested into it. Such a grand scale for a university production, says Mr. William, "would be unheard of anywhere in England." Smiling, he points out the set, made by the design department, as one of high quality.

*Love For Love*, Mr. William explains, is a Restoration comedy written in 1695, by William Congreve. Congreve was only twenty-five years old when he wrote it.

"Brilliant!" exclaims Mr. William, shaking his head in amazement, "Of course, people matured a lot sooner than . . . people graduated from university at age sixteen."

*Love For Love* was a great success when it first was produced in London, but was suppressed during the nineteenth century. "They objected to some of the vulgar elements of the play," said William, "like making love on the stage, and so on." It seems that twentieth century audiences are inured to this sort of thing, and *Love For Love* is a popular play in repertoire.

*Love For Love* has a very complicated plot, all about [you guessed it] love. "The theme is that the course of true love never did run smooth — but Prince Charming gets the girl in the end." The situations of the play, according to Mr. William, are unchanging, universal.

Therefore, the play can still be appreciated even though the language is old-fashioned;

"more stylized, in an extremely educated way." This problem, claims Mr. William, is reduced by "expressive acting". "If the actors understand the language, then they can communicate the humanity of it to the audience . . . to see the life lying underneath the words." "At the beginning of such a play, the audience is in a fog during the first five minutes, due to the strange speech, but then this early morning mist clears, and they can see the fields, so to speak." Tone of voice and gesture also contributes to better understanding.

*Love For Love*, claims Mr. William, is an ensemble play; there are no leading characters, but a democratic distribution of roles. Therefore, it is important that the actors work together well. Mr. William is looking forward to see the end result of his labour before he returns to England.

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