

# ARTS SECTION



A TYPICAL DON MILLS FAMILY

## Glendon production looks at life in suburbia

By MARY JANKULAK

The age-old theme of the banality of everyday life is given a new face in the comedy *Bordering on Toronto—A Day in the Life of Don Mills*.

Written by two Glendon students, Mike and John Erskine-Kellie, *A Day in the Life of Don Mills* incorporates videos, slides, songs and original music by Bill Lasovich into one production. In a mocking tone, the play scrutinizes the foibles of a stereotypical North American suburban community. While it is always risky to present stereotypical situations (such as two fathers cheering their hockey playing sons) within the context of this play the situations

work, and they work largely because the audience is not asked to delve into the characters.

The framework of *A Day in the Life* is a play within a play. The writers appear in the play three times as themselves, and once in drag as two shrieking, mincing gossips. No effort is taken to present these two annoying women in anything but a superficial manner and perhaps that's why they're so funny. It's safe and comfortable laughter.

The strengths of the play are in the dialogue and the comedic timing. Sixteen vignettes are presented in an episodic structure and four commercials (three live and one taped) serve as smooth transitions between episodes.

The commercials do not detract from the episodes, however, because they retain the suburban themes of loneliness and aimless boredom. One commercial features a harassed husband (Ian Speiran) complaining to his ever-smiling, plastic-faced wife (Katherine Greenwood) about a hard day at the office. She administers a "Suburban Sedative," and he bounds from his chair with renewed vigor, ready to repave the driveway and panel the rec-room.

Another commercial features a door-to-door salesman visiting a bored housewife. He tells her about *Sensational Suburban Stories*. "Easy to read, even easier to write," he boasts. These kind of snappy punchlines conveniently wrap-up the commercials and typify the style of the show.

The second scene in the show establishes what Don Mills is in the play: both a mythical hero and a community. The playwrights felt that it was important to establish the fact that their mythical founder, Donald Mills, hates the place.

"The representative of the community is a guy who never wanted to be there in the first place," John said. "He was an Englishman who was kicked out of England," and the play moves from this premise.

When asked if it is difficult being brothers working so closely together, John noted that "it couldn't work without the support of each other."

"We balance each other really nicely, and can basically anticipate what each other is going to write. We compliment each other's styles," his brother Mike added.

The brothers share a witty repair-

tee and when talking it becomes apparent why the dialogue on-stage flows so well. Overhearing the brother's easy bantering, one gets the feeling they could be rehearsing the rough draft of their next play.

A year ago the Erskine-Kellie brothers brought the Don Mills script to director Steve Devine. "What Steve did," said John, "was suggest other scenes that would balance it out and make it more of a full-scale play because we still didn't really have a beginning." Devine then edited the script with its authors to its present shape.

The brothers have written four plays together in the past three years and a workshop of *A Day in the Life of Don Mills* was recently part of the Theatre Centre's R & D series. Future plans for the play include its performance in Edmonton's Fringe Theatre Festival in August of this year.

This is an ambitious project from two talented young playwrights whom we'll be hearing a lot more of. *Bordering on Toronto—A Day in the Life of Don Mills* will be presented at Theatre Glendon from March 17 to March 21. Shows begin at 8:30 and tickets are \$4.00 at the door.

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## Jacalyn's story is a good idea wasted in a tedious production



**LOOK HOW LONG YOUR LIFE LINE IS:** Jacalyn (Karen Scanlan) shares a tender moment with American diplomat Charles (Richard Hardacre).

By ANGELA LAWRENCE

Good theatre has the ability to shatter temporality. Poor plays have the opposite effect, making one almost hear the minutes ticking slowly by. Unfortunately, *Jacalyn* falls into the latter category.

The world premiere of *Jacalyn*, a play written by American playwright Carol Wolf Holtzman and directed by Paula Sperdakos, is currently being presented by the Next Stage theatre company.

The Next Stage was founded in 1984 by three enthusiastic actors: York graduate Jeannette Lambert, Jill Kinsella and Karen Scanlan, who plays the lead role in *Jacalyn*.

The play is an emotional drama about a naive American woman who gets into trouble while travelling through an anonymous Latin American country. As the plot unfolds, the audience learns the circumstances behind Jacalyn's predicament.

In a Latin American country participating in an archeological dig, Jacalyn extends her visit in order to take advantage of the country's beautiful landscape and culture. While sight-seeing, she meets and eventually falls in love with Charles (Richard Hardacre), an American

diplomat who works at the local U.S. embassy. During this time Jacalyn becomes friends with some local people who also happen to be political rebels.

As a bleeding-heart American liberal, Jacalyn stupidly gets involved in the rebel cause and helps to plan a coup. Ironically, the plan backfires and Jacalyn and her friends are ambushed, arrested, incarcerated and sentenced to death.

The play begins three months after Jacalyn is imprisoned. Her new cellmate is Camilla de Vargas (played by veteran actress Nonnie Griffin), the wife of the ex Vice-President. Evading the reality of her fate, Jacalyn informs Camilla that she is certain that she will be saved by the U.S. government, but Camilla knows the truth—Jacalyn will be executed at sundown.

The audience learns that Camilla's daughter Sofia was also imprisoned (in the same cell) and executed for her political affiliations. Therefore, Camilla must deal with the finality of her daughter's death while Jacalyn must deal with the reality of her own death sentence.

Yet Jacalyn still pins much hope on the efforts of her diplomat boyfriend Charles. During his first visit, Charles consoles Jacalyn and leaves

her with a sense of hope. However, on his second and final visit, it becomes all too obvious that there is nothing that anyone can do to help her.

Jacalyn eventually comes to terms with her unalterable fate and conveys her last requests to Camilla and Charles. She asks Charles, for example, to have her ashes spread on "her" hill behind her house in Maryland.

Although *Jacalyn* has the potential to be a very endearing and emotional play, there are some definite hindrances in this production.

Firstly, the play is much too lengthy (2½ hours). It appears that Holtzman has drawn out a good story to equal a boring play consisting of redundant emotional cycles: Jacalyn cries, Jacalyn laughs, she cries, she laughs...

The plot centres around Jacalyn and Camilla reminiscing about their lives before their imprisonment, and Charles and Jacalyn revealing their love for one another. The result is a dull compilation of "remember whens" and "what ifs."

Secondly, the acting by both Scanlan (Jacalyn) and Hardacre (Charles), lends to the play's shallow qualities.

Although Scanlan makes a commendable effort to capture the emotional disparity of the character, she falls short. Instead, she creates an inappropriate hyper-portrayal of Jacalyn; a roller coaster ride of emotional highs and lows with little substance in between. The result is a schizophrenic characterization of Jacalyn.

Hardacre's portrayal of Charles is stiff and awkward. His obvious discomfort is most noticeable in the affectionate scenes with Scanlan.

The major flaw by both actors is their inability to make the audience forget that they are acting. As a result, they are unable to draw the audience into the depths of their frightening situation.

On the brighter side, Griffin offers a superb performance in her portrayal of Camilla, and is thoroughly convincing. In addition, the natural acting abilities of Silvio Oliviero stand out in his enjoyable performance as Ernesto the prison guard.

Although *Jacalyn* is an interesting play, significant flaws in The Next Stage production prevent it from being effective or enjoyable.

*Jacalyn* is now at the Adelaide Theatre until March 22.