

Everything Comes Together in Richmond Hill's Fatal Attraction

River Cities' Reader – August 14, 2002 - by Jill Pearson

After seeing the Friday night performance of Richmond Hill Barn Theatre's latest murder mystery, *Fatal Attraction*, one line stood out: "The American public will accept anything except being bored."

Audiences don't have to worry, because there's no room for boredom during Bernard Slade's two-and-a-half-hour thriller. The action is almost non-stop, the characters are engaging, and the technical elements give the show a nice finishing touch.

Fatal Attraction, of course, is also the title of a popular 1987 film, but this is a completely different story. Blair Griffin (Melissa Adams), an attractive middle-aged actress, is in the process of divorcing her husband, Morgan Richards (Reggie Jarrell). After he is murdered by Tony (Ken Ohr), a member of the paparazzi who has been interested in Blair's life for almost 20 years, detectives are summoned to interrogate the actress.

Head cop Gus Braden – a rugged, middle-aged charmer – discovers, along with the audience, some interesting relationships involving Blair. And she'll do whatever it takes to protect her secrets from the media. From here, love, deceit, cunning, and sex appeal take over the story.

Aside from the plot, Craig Michaels is a major reason, if not the reason, to see *Fatal Attraction*. The moment he steps on stage, it is apparent why he was chosen for the lead male role. His Bogart-ian accent, cunning witticisms, and nonchalant movements all appear natural and unforced. Michaels serves as the center the other actors hold on to.

Melissa Adams plays Blair as the character is intended to be portrayed – a seductive, attractive waif who shows little emotion and is sometimes unbelievable. Adams' downfall is the lack of feeling and variety she puts into her character, because, even though Blair has been a practicing actress for years, it's sometimes apparent that Adams is forcing lines straight from the script. But overall, she fits the character well, and carries herself confidently, which makes it easier to overlook any stumbling.

Denise Yoder and Ken Ohr both contribute nicely to the action, Yoder as the tag-a-long cop and Ohr as the photographer with an obsession with Blair. The only poor casting choice was Lindsay Weisser as Blair's agent.

She's not bad as an actress but is much too young for the role.

Speaking of age, *Fatal Attraction* is being dubbed an "adult thriller" for reasons involving key plot twists, and also because Adams is traipsing around in satin nightgowns and undergarments for half of the show. There are also some moments of sexual humor between Gus and the female characters – but the talk is kept pretty clean compared to language found in other media. The level of actual on-stage intimacy is also very slight.

Only two scenes can be remotely described as "shocking," one made all the more impressive by lighting effects. During the scene, the only visual access is by a faint light cast on the floor from a "skylight" above.

This is just one example of an innovative technical aspect that elevates *Fatal Attraction*, which is also distinguished by strong acting. It's not high art, but it isn't distasteful, either. And as a murder mystery, all the elements are intact.

Richmond Hill script is awash in 'Fatal' flaws

Quad City Times – August 15, 2002 - by Ruby Nancy

Before you ask: no, this script is nothing like the movie. The title is the same, but that's where the resemblance ends.

This is definitely a text that might make it onto a movie screen, though, since plenty of lousy scripts turn up on the big screen. And saying the writing in this show is lousy is an understatement — a major one.

I'm sure I've never seen such good acting wasted on material of this quality. There is plenty of top notch talent in this show, but it doesn't do any of them any good. The play is pointless and so ostentatiously overwrought it wouldn't even work as melodrama.

That's too bad, really, since Melissa Adams gives her all in the multi-layered role of has-been starlet Blair Griffin. Adams finally gets a great role she can sink her teeth into — a complex study of a woman who has learned to survive in a world of surface instead of substance — and there's no plausible motivation or even a play to go with the part. She's fantastic here, and it's almost worth sitting through the (very occasionally funny, sometimes even on purpose) 2 ½-hour show to see her work. Here's hoping she gets another chance at a role that's attached to a script.

More talent is squandered on this "Fatal Attraction," including the work of Kenneth Ohr, Reggie Jarrell, Denise Yoder, Craig Michaels and relative newcomer Lindsey Weisser. You might see some couples paired up in ways you won't see on most other stages around here, but that daring doesn't go far enough to help much either.

A nice set and some fine tech round out this exercise in waste, but that doesn't really matter either.

Here's looking forward to Richmond Hill's September show: "All Because of Agatha" opens Sept. 5.