

No 'Lies': RHP talent rises above spotty script

Quad City Times – September 8, 2004 - by Ruby Nancy

The latest offering from the Richmond Hill Players is "Pack of Lies," a Hugh Whitmore drama based on a true story. First-time director Chris Falgiani has assembled a cast of actors with roughly 100 years of cumulative acting experience for this Cold War-era piece, and longtime audience members will recognize some of their favorite performers in the roles found here.

More focused on the relationship between two women who are neighbors and friends than on political intrigue, "Pack of Lies" tells the story of a family asked to spy on the couple across the street, offering a look at what happens to relationships in and between the two households as a result of the espionage and suspicion.

It's a spotty, disjointed script that perhaps doesn't deserve all the talent lavished on it, but at the heart of the play is the connection between Barbara Jackson (Diane Greenwood) and Helen Kroger (Stacie Kintigh). The two women are close friends, often getting together more than once a day for tea, conversation and the occasional dress fitting.

Polar opposites in terms of background and personality, the friendship between these two women is the show's primary asset, and the two actors do all they can with it.

Helen is brash and outgoing, moving like a muddy puppy in a clean kitchen and peppering conversations with tales of a childhood in rural Canada, and Kintigh infuses the role with steamroller energy and rapid-fire chatter. Barbara is a tense, reserved Englishwoman whose unlikely friendship with the younger woman has become increasingly important to her, and Greenwood, who usually gets more wacky or over-the-top roles, turns in an emotional, restrained performance that nearly vibrates with contained tension.

Greg Cripple does nice work as Barbara's husband, Bob, emanating quiet concern, and Tabitha Black is Julie, their daughter, whose performance is often quite good — though some of the mother-daughter arguments resembled a staged shouting match you might see on a television "reality" show. Greg Kerr's turn as Peter, Helen's husband, is more than adequate as well, though it's a role not developed well in the script (and Kerr's program bio is much more entertaining).

The balance of the cast also do fine work, including John VanDeWoestyne as stiff and stuffy Mr. Stewart, a quintessential British civil servant, and Jessica Nicol and Ann Morman as a couple of lesser government employees who are generally referred to as "girls."

English and Canadian accents started out rather crisp at the performance I saw last weekend, and though they flattened out some as the show moved along, it really had very little effect, since the play itself is not at all riveting. Costuming and staging for "Pack of Lies" has plenty of nice touches, from the sometimes goofy '60s-Brit ensembles to the very nice little suits sported by Greenwood, plus a truly bare-bones set that provided little more than black-painted geometric pieces and a stage floor.

It's what you might call a bit of a snoozer, despite the talent and best efforts of these actors, and — despite its central theme about the depth of friendship — it's a show that only fans of these individual performers could love.

Less means more for Richmond Hill's 'Lies'

Argus/Dispatch – September 9, 2004 - by Julie Jensen

The Richmond Hill Players production of "Pack of Lies" by Hugh Whitmore is a dramatization of real events that occurred in a London suburb in 1960-61, and they make it seem real with well-done and not over-done accents and a minimal set.

Although this is a Cold War scenario, its themes of betrayal, the meaning of friendship and government invasion of private lives is relevant to the present moment and beyond.

Monologues by the characters probe the meaning of scenes played out, and the director, Chris Falgiani, has paced the interchange very well.

Greg Cripple plays Bob Jackson, the Londoner who, with his wife and daughter, has become friendly with a Canadian couple living in their neighborhood. His accent is right on, and he projects the reined-in emotion we have come to expect from the English.

Diane Greenwood is Barbara Jackson, his wife. She's a tense perfectionist who worries perpetually -- a switch from her many comic roles -- and the audience empathizes with her pangs, both psychic and physical.

Tabitha Black is Julie, the Jacksons' daughter, and she does an excellent job of portraying a girl engaged in the old mother-daughter duel that has to be fought to reach adulthood.

John Vandewoestyne is an imposing Mr. Stewart, a trench-coated investigator with an umbrella who turns the Jacksons lives upside-down.

The Canadians are Peter Kroger, played by Greg Kerr, and Helen, his wife, played by Stacie Kintigh. They are easy-going and friendly, and Helen is given to risqué remarks. They make no attempt to adopt a Canadian accent

The cast is rounded out by Thelma, played by Jessica Nicol; and Sally, played by Ann Morman. They are surveillance agents who more or less invade the Jackson home to keep watch on the home of their neighbors, the Krogers.

The unfolding of the plot goes along like a detective story. Don't cough, or you'll miss a clue.