

## **'Rumors' about laughter are true at Richmond Hill**

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"Rumors" is another one of those Neil Simon plays where almost all the characters are rich and self-involved, and where you're pretty sure you aren't going to care about what happens to any of them.

In this case, though, Simon has assembled enough of these nouveau riche into one place to make you laugh. Even if you don't really like them, this particular collection of navel-gazers can certainly crack you up. Director Renaud Haymon has assembled a cast of performers who bring the silly story to life, and they will provide more than two hours of amusement in this silly play.

At the invitation of friends celebrating a 10th wedding anniversary, four couples arrive - one pair at a time - to find their hosts aren't available, the servants are gone, and there is no party food for them to eat. Each couple tries to explain and/or hide what they know about the missing pair, occasionally calls a doctor with questions about assorted injuries, and as the crowd grows larger, so do the stories. By the time a cop arrives with questions about a doomed BMW and then about gunshots, the stories become confused and explanations get even stranger.

Kevin Brake is Ken Gorman, the lawyer who wants to protect the reputation of his host and client, and his work provides a strong baseline for all the performers who come on stage later. He plays Gorman as long suffering and concerned with appearances, then breaks him down as the stories progress and circle each other.

As Claire Ganz, Lorrie Halsall starts out a bit stiff, then comes alive as the stage fills up. She plays Ganz as a trifle dim, but adept enough to appreciate a little intrigue. Her rapport with Craig Michaels (who plays her husband, Lenny) also is awkward at first, but is particularly good in the second act when she responds to every nuance in his quickly concocted explanation to the police.

Michaels is excellent, and his frenetic, obsessive work earns the biggest laughs of all in this show. April DeBeir, as Cookie Cusack, will also crack you up with every droll and clueless roll of her eyes, and some of her back-spasm antics are absolutely hilarious. She has a real gift for comedic timing. Geoff Loving's stage debut as Officer Welch is also a real hoot, and hopefully we can look forward to seeing him on stage again.

Chris Browne and Sara Veldhuizen Stealy (as Glenn and Cassie Cooper) stalk onto stage together, and the palpable tension between their characters is instantly obvious. In their capable hands, profoundly unhappy can also be profoundly funny. They also have to have an authentic argument in a situation where many actors would probably break character and burst out laughing at all the funny things everyone around them is saying. And they succeed at staying in character.

Actually, one of the most surprising thing about this show may be that none of the 10 cast members does burst out laughing - because you certainly will. This show has plenty of funny lines and real jokes, and in the hands of capable performers is quite a treat.

A nice set adds background, though the costumes don't quite live up to the income bracket of the characters. Many of the men are in tuxedos, but the women's costumes are a disappointment for the most part. Halsall's ensemble works, but the others either lack the luxurious look or lack the proper foundation garments to make them look the way they should. I know, I know - it's a minor point for people who don't care about clothes, but it could be done the right way.

Even fashionistas and perfectionists will be laughing too loud to complain. Take this as truth: "Rumors" is a lot of fun.