

## *Mary's Wedding* a Feast for Theatregoers

The celebrated First World War play *Mary's Wedding*, by Canadian Stephen Massicotte, is the first production of the Atlantic Repertory Company's 2019/2020 season.

Now entering its second year, the Atlantic Repertory Company (ARC) is the brainchild of the Saint John Theatre Company and was created to "help young professionals with strong ties to Atlantic Canada bridge the gap between advanced training and a steady career path in theatre."

ARC's production, which recently opened in Saint John, is now on tour across parts of New Brunswick before heading to Europe for performances in Germany and Paris.

The play itself is an epic love story set during the war years between Charlie, a young Canadian farm boy, and Mary, a recent British immigrant. And having seen a solid production of the play five years ago, I must admit I came in with high expectations.

**To say that that my expectations were met is a bit of an understatement.**

**Overall, this was an especially tight production, both in terms of pace as well as lighting and sound cues. And the story moves forward effortlessly with energy and efficiency** – all crucial elements in a play that is roughly 90 minutes long with no intermission.

Another challenge for a small touring show like this is how to stage it for transportation across the Atlantic without losing any of the magic. To their credit, the production team's solution was to keep to the mantra, "less is more"; that is, the set consisted of two large canvases on which to project scene elements and visual effects, as well as a long multi-purpose bench. Coupled with minimalist lighting and sound, this paired-down production allowed the artists to put their best craft forward.

**Veteran director Stephen Tobias succeeds in creating visually captivating tableaux and seamless scene shifts.** The horse-riding scenes were particularly rewarding, as well as the final battlefield sequence; Tobias is to be commended for negotiating that fine line between giving the audience too much and inviting them to imagine the space. Admittedly, there were a few times when I thought the blocking was a bit static, but it was never long enough to detract from the energy of the drama.

**As for the actors, both Caroline Bell (Mary) and Kenzie Delo (Charlie) delivered solid performances. Bell in particular did well in her considerably challenging role, since she had to navigate between performing the character of Mary as well as Sergeant Flowers. But she succeeded in flawlessly switching between the two, both in terms of speech as well as body language.** At times her British accent wavered. There were also moments when Mary's emotions could have been a bit more nuanced. But the energy and command of Bell's performance could afford such minor miscues, which will no doubt disappear with time and experience.

**Delo also offered a convincing portrayal of the youthful, impressionable Charlie. His use of physicality on the stage was effective,** although there were moments early on where his delivery felt a bit too theatrical. But Delo's performance improved as the play progressed, culminating with the final scene, in which he demonstrated the full range of his abilities as a young actor.

**In short, if you miss this production, you will be missing out on a wonderful theatrical experience.**