

The Leisure Society

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By François Archambault. Translated by Bobby Theodore. Directed by Diane Brown. A Ruby Slippers Theatre production. At Performance Works until April 9

The Leisure Society is a razor-sharp satire that often veers precariously close to crossing the thin line between hilarity and offensiveness. That's what makes this perfectly poised production so exhilarating to watch.

Montreal playwright François Archambault's corrosive script peels back the curtains on a seemingly ideal couple. Peter and Mary appear to have it all: they make lots of money, live in a gorgeous home, have a baby, and are seeking to adopt "a little Chinese girl" so that someone can learn to play the piano they've bought. But neither knows how to care for their child, they haven't had satisfying sex in ages, and they've invited their best friend, Mark (who's recently divorced and sowing his wild oats again), over for dinner so they can terminate their friendship—or maybe, on second thought, have a threesome—with him. Things get complicated when Mark shows up with Paula, his 21-year-old fuck buddy, in tow.

Archambault's dialogue is brutally funny, and his deceptively simple plot is a marvel of comic engineering, as the characters' respective secrets converge in ever more outrageous revelations—and actions. Under Diane Brown's seamless direction, everything crackles giddily, darkly along.

Brown has assembled a dream cast. Colleen Wheeler expertly exposes the desperation beneath Mary's brittle veneer; she punctuates the character's random stabs at truth-telling with a forced, nervous laugh that's addictively funny. And just wait till she gets drunk and dances. It's a must-see performance.

Peter is also tightly wound, but Scott Bellis reveals the sense of helplessness that drives his anxious social climbing. Robert Moloney finds the humanity in Mark's caddishness—no easy feat. And newcomer Hazel Venzon does a nice job of balancing Paula's worldliness and her innocence. Although she's young and sexually promiscuous, Paula is the only character with any grasp of the concept of personal responsibility.

Yvan Morissette's set beautifully captures the upscale elegance and austerity of Peter and Mary's world, with sleek, angular furniture and a view of the Vancouver skyline (a gorgeous projection by Tim Matheson) dominating the back wall. Amos Hertzman's sound design uses a simple conceit to echo the play's deeply ironic sensibility.

If you like your comedy bitter, a little scary, and beautifully executed, you'll love The Leisure Society.