

arts & entertainment

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula



The talented ensemble of *Don't Dress For Dinner* – (left to right) Jenn Lane, Dann Wilhelm, Rebecca Sutherland, Greg Tunner, Tomas Gamba and Lori Tych. The show continues at Coast Capital Playhouse until Feb. 24.

Fred Partridge photo

White Rock Players Club farce an amusing French soufflé

Dinner well served, even if heat is low

If comedy comes from the realization that most human endeavour has its ridiculous side, farce depends on the notion that fallible humans are never more potentially foolish than when following the dictates of lust.

In English farce, much of the humour derives from sheer embarrassment that such compulsions even exist – *No Sex, Please, We're British*, to quote the title of one of the more famous examples.

In the more-liberal French version, on the other hand, most of the merriment derives from the extraordinary single-mindedness with which the protagonists pursue their objects of desire, building up a litany of argument and half-truths that becomes so weighty and baffling that, in the end, the only possible response of the duped individual is a Gallic shrug of the shoulders before doffing the duds and joining in the general mischief.

In either case, the comedy tinder needs the spark of at

least a couple of characters whose passionate anticipation amounts to a caricature of clothes-tearing frenzy.

Which brings me to the current offering of the White Rock Players Club, Marc Camoletti's French farce *Don't*

Dress For Dinner.

It's an entertaining show that, while lengthy, is clearly winning laughs from a White Rock audience hungry for grown-up fare.

The smooth staging of director Julianne Christie – and an obvious knack with the comedy business, slapstick set-pieces and virtual filibusters of fibbing built into this script – makes one keen to see her return at the helm of another comedy (and rumour has it that the Players Club is contemplating an all-comedy line-up for 2018-19).

But while an attractive and talented ensemble generally serve up an appetizing menu, the downside for me was – at last Friday's night performance, at least – the surprisingly low

temperature of the oven.

Englishman Bernard (Dan Wilhelm) and his Italian wife Jacqueline (Lori Tych) live in a converted farmhouse in the countryside two hours from Paris. Knowing that Jacqueline will be visiting her mother for the weekend, Bernard plans an at-home tryst as a birthday treat for his lingerie model mistress Suzanne (Rebecca Sutherland) and hires a *cordon bleu* chef, Suzette (Jenn Lane), to cook them a romantic supper.

He has also invited a 'beard' to the farmhouse – his old pal Robert (Tomas Gamba), unaware that Robert and Jacqueline have become lovers. When suspicious Jacqueline decides to call off her trip at the 11th hour, Bernard's plans – not to mention Robert's peace-of-mind – go seriously sideways, with Suzette being mistaken for Suzanne, and vice-versa. Multiple misunderstandings later, a further threat looms in the form of George (Greg Tunner), Suzette's jealous husband.

While Wilhelm (seen to

advantage in last season's *Leading Ladies*) is always an adroit farceur, mobile of expression and adept at business, his oddly un-randy Bernard – at the performance I saw, he seemed only moderately put-out when his assignation with Suzanne went south – sadly deprives the farrago of much of its central impetus.

Tych, as always, is an on-target delight, whether her Jacqueline is spitting out immaculately accented Italian imprecations, generating the show's more believable passion (in exchanges with Robert), tunefully vocalizing an '80s hit, or getting hot and bothered by George's musculature.

Gamba is equally rewarding as Bernard's more reserved friend Robert – from his well-judged Englishness to his befuddled bewilderment and increasing inebriation – bringing a welcome sense of fun to the role.

Sutherland's Suzanne provides a suitably pouty and provocative touch for such a soufflé, alternating bubbly eagerness with justifiable resentment at

It's an entertaining show that... is clearly winning laughs.



Alex Browne
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lines