

The importance of seeing Ernest

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By Greg Burliuk

Geeks in love are not a pretty sight. That was my impression of the first 10 minutes of *The Anger in Ernest & Ernestine*, the opening production of Theatre Kingston's season.

And I thought I was going to be in

Humorous characters and great acting make *The Anger in Ernest & Ernestine* worthwhile

for a long night.

Perhaps cartoon characters in love might be a more apt description.

Ernest was tall, gangly with Coke-bottle spectacles and a high whiny voice; Ernestine was a chunky whirlwind, whose energy seemed to be always on the verge of sweeping her off her feet. Instead, 90 minutes flew by as I was caught up in highly entertaining exhibition of acting

and a parable about relationships.

The play was written by Leah Cherniak, Robert Morgan and Martha Ross in 1987 and was originally designed for clowns.

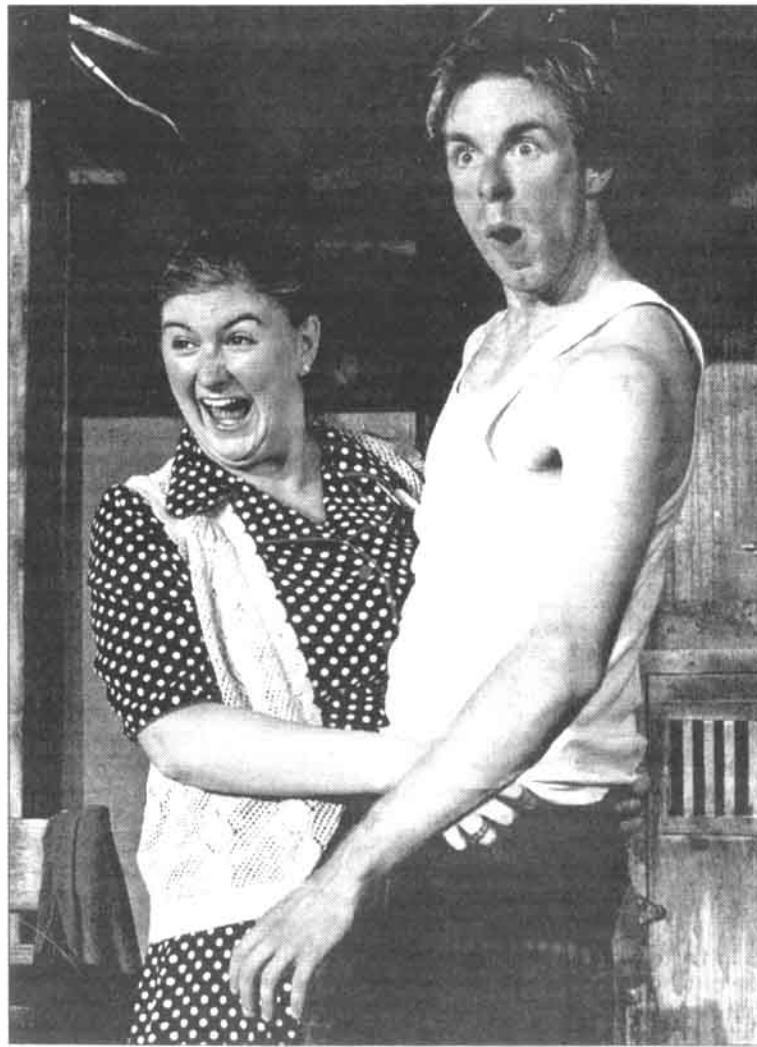
And indeed director Kim Renders has certainly included a lot of physical comedy in the play, some of it from the script but other bits of her own doing.

What ultimately makes this production work so beautifully, however, is that bit by bit and as weird as they are, we slowly begin to believe in Ernest and Ernestine as real people. Their relationship resonates with us and our own relationships.

We meet the couple madly in love and about to get married. Soon they move into a grotty little basement, or should I say furnace room apartment – Thousand Islands Playhouse designer Dan Rider has outdone himself as this place is so grubby, you can almost feel the rats scurrying around the furnace.

It doesn't take long before the obvious clash of personalities occurs. Ernest is fastidious to the point of being annoying in his insistence of where things should go.

And Ernestine, well, if she was a cartoon character, she'd be a cross between the Tasmanian Devil and Wilma Flintstone.

Megan Deeks and Ryan Howard Clement star in *The Anger in Ernest & Ernestine*.

THE ANGER IN ERNEST & ERNESTINE

A play by Leah Cherniak, Robert Morgan and Martha Ross.

Directed by Kim Renders.

Set and lighting design by Dan Rider.

Stage manager – Megan Miles.

A Theatre Kingston production now playing at the Wellington Street Theatre, 126 Wellington St., until Oct. 28, with performances from Tuesday to Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m.

CAST

Ernestine – Megan Deeks

Ernest – Ryan Howard Clement

Rating: ★★★½ out of five

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She flies around the set chirping and screeching.

An early example shows how different these two are from each other.

Ernest sets at the table, thoroughly enjoying his Rice Krispies while ritualistically reading the box's list of ingredients.

He looks on in horror when Ernestine comes roaring in late for work, inhales her cereal, makes up her face, brushes her teeth all in 30 seconds then flies up the long stairwell only to come back a minute later for her hat.

This is done three times – perhaps there should be a little more varied business to Ernestine's routine – and each time Ernest becomes more exasperated.

Through a series of blackouts we begin to see things go downhill, although there is one scene where in the middle of a meltdown (literally since the furnace won't turn off in the middle of the summer), the pair suddenly end up making love, which is represented here in a series of hilarious tableaux.

And there is one other moment in the midst of deterioration, where the two come together.

Their car has run into a pole and they become outraged over signage they feel has caused the accident. They try to write an angry letter to the city but it becomes more and more an exercise in creative swearing.

I find the play ends too abruptly and without any real meaningful conclusions, but by then I was so delighted with the performance of the actors, it almost didn't matter.

I was particularly taken with the acting of Megan Deeks as Ernestine. For starters she had high voltage energy – her morning breakfast scene done three times had me huffing and puffing, but she scarcely seemed out of breath afterwards. Even more impressive is that she has a twinkle in her eye that indicates she's having fun, and that makes it even more fun to watch her.

Equally as impressive is Ryan Howard Clement as Ernest who manages to keep his nerdy character sympathetic, even though he has some ugly sides to his personality. Clement also doesn't make Ernest seem like a dumb idiot, which would be easy to do.

But since this play is such a theatrical pas de deux, what's most impressive is how these two play off each other, especially when their characters are fighting.

This production is an off-the-wall treat, even if it is unconventional as all get out. **T**