

Part comedy, part horror movie

'Dads!' does have happy ending, giving hope to fathers everywhere

By RONALD ZAJAC
Staff Writer

First-time fatherhood is a slow but steady slide into sleep deprivation, with some fun song-and-dance along the way.

At least, that's playwright Robert More's take on modern man in *Dads! The Musical*, a gentle satire on the fate of testosterone thinking that opened at the Brockville Arts Centre Thursday night.

Part *Mr. Mom* and part *Muppet Show*, it's also part horror movie for anyone in the audience about to be a first-time dad. Until the ending, that is.

The local premiere of the production, a collaboration between Brockville's St. Lawrence Stage Company and Port Dover's Lighthouse Festival Theatre, drew a good crowd, though short of a sell-out.

It's the story of three men of different backgrounds who share the common state of being, as the title of the opening number says, *Cocksure But Confused* after the double-whammy of first-time fatherhood and sudden unemployment.

Kirk, played by Stage Company regular Brett McCaig, is a muscle-building worker, Joey (Murray Furrow) a burned-out and neurotic Latin teacher and Charles (Greg Campbell) a brashly confident

FAST FACTS

What: *Dads! The Musical*.

When: July 5-21.

Where: Brockville Arts Centre.

Tickets: \$26.75 (adults), \$24.08 (seniors), \$21.40 (16 and under). Call 342-7122.

executive; all three undergo symbolic emasculation as they are forced to stay at home and care for their newborn infants while their wives bring home the bacon.

Or, as McCaig's character complains: "Things were a lot easier being one of the guys."

The story takes them from uncertainty, through despair, to a symbolic rebirth, as they emerge from their *Testosterone Tango* as fuller, better rounded individuals.

All of which is serious stuff, but delivered in a package of masterful comedy, with McCaig in particular bringing back some of the over-the-top moves he first delivered here three years ago in *Forever Plaid*, much to the audience's delight.

There are some clever lines, but this is primarily physical comedy, exaggerated silliness done with precision and skill in such songs as *Jungle Dad* and *A Fistful of Pampers*, with Tom Doyle providing

excellent musical direction.

The puppet babies generally enhance the physical comedy, although their design verges on the grotesque and goblin-like, prompting some audience members to make unflattering comparisons to the infamous Chucky of the schlock horror film *Child's Play*. This esthetic dissonance is perhaps the play's only flaw.

More impressive is the vaudevillian performance of Naomi Emmerson, who plays all the female roles, everything from a scantily clad waitress to a white-coated physician with an exaggerated Russian accent. Her clock-defying costume changes were deft enough to convince some audience members this play has two female actors.

The engaging Emmerson has a lot to carry on her shoulders, as she must represent The Woman in general, as wife, mother and the seductress of the men's fantasies.

She is also the other half of the equation with whom the men are reconciled, giving this play its happy ending.

Because this production, while not attempting to solve the large questions of masculine identity, is optimistic at heart - even if the happy ending can only come once the baby finally sleeps through the night.