REVIEW: Ripcord, written by David Linsay-Arbaire, directed by Ian Harding

Reviewed by Phoebe Biddle for Backstage Christchurch - Theatre Reviews

I always jump at the chance to review Repertory's plays when they're on, and I'm always amazed at the talent displayed on the stage. It's not just that they seem to pick the perfect play every time, or that the actors are well cast and insanely talented. It's also the incredible set designs, the use of lighting and shadows, the music and soundscape they create... It's a full immersive experience, and I am always awestruck and amazed.

The play itself this time is very charming. Ripcord follows two old women in a home, forced to share a room. One happy, chipper, enthusiastic lady called Marilyn, and one grumpy, cantankerous one called Abby. Marilyn doesn't want to move rooms, but Abby desperately wants her gone. I won't spoil it because I sincerely hope you'll go and see it if you can, but I'm sure you can imagine the hilarity that ensues! It's not just funny, though. It's also poignant, real, and emotional. Part of that is the play itself, written by the amazing David Lindsay-Abaire, along with the careful direction of the inimitable Ian Harding, but mostly it was thanks to the actors themselves. As Repertory's biggest fan, I have seen Pene Maddock (Abby) and Marilyn Ollett (Marilyn) in plays before, and I know they are both extremely talented. Their work in Ripcord was no exception. They truly embraced and became their characters, and kept the audience hooked and engaged in every little thing that was happening onstage. I laughed with them, cried with them, felt sorry and happy for them. I truly believed they were bitter rivals, and it just made the entire thing more fun to watch! I'd also like to praise Emmett Robinson as Scotty, one of the carers of the home. I read in the programme that this is their first acting role since high school, and I really hope they continue with it because they were excellent (despite what Abby might say!). With only 7 characters in total, everyone had to be exceptional, and they really were, so props to the casting director, too.

I always love the set design of Repertory plays, but this one in particular really contributed to the excellence of this play, I think. The set was so quaint, featuring two single beds against angled walls to created the illusion of a small room. A door to the side led backstage, and one at the back led to a small bathroom. It was simple yet effective, and it looked like a lot of care went into creating and staging it. The personalities of the characters were shown in the decor as well, which I really enjoyed. Abby had very little personal memorabilia other than an armchair and some plants and kept a neat and orderly space. Marilyn had photos of her family all over her dresser, her bed was toussled, and she kicked her shoes off without a care when she entered the room. Something so simple and yet it really showed the disparity in the two characters' personalities.

I can't really say much more other than that I thoroughly enjoyed this play and truly think it deserves more seats being filled in that auditorium, so please get along to see it if you can. The play runs at Elmwood Auditorium from November 18 to 28, so get in quick!