



The cast of *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* (Jane Miller, Micheal Querin, Michael Hogeveen and Kristi Frank) on the set in the Studio Theatre at the Opera House.

Laughing at love

Orillians seem to love plays that probe the depths of relationships to discover humour

By John Swartz Special To The Packet & Times

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Opening day, the cast of *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* has just finished its last dress rehearsal and the curtain will go up in two hours.

It's as good a time as any to interview the participants about the new play which runs to the end of the month in the Studio Theatre at the Opera House.

Except, it turns into a bit of a free for all with four cast members (Michael Hogeveen, Micheal Querin, Jane Miller and Kristi Frank) music director John Hughes, director Candace Jennings, and choreographer Dave Campbell on the set, but itching to get something to eat and relax before showtime.

Hogeveen, Frank and Miller were here last summer to act in Suds and Married Alive. Querin is the new kid on the block.

"In 2000, I was in HMS Pinafore. David Savoy directed and I was Capt. Corcoran," Querin said.

"For the last nine years, I was at Shaw Festival. I was in the Mystery of Edwin Drood, a musical they did back in 2001," he continued.

"That's the author of Thumbs, which we are doing next," Campbell interjects.

"Rupert Holmes, the guy who wrote Pina Colada," Querin says.

Oh really? Is Holmes going to be on hand when Thumbs opens?

"I wish," Campbell said.

"He came to our show. He came to almost every production of Drood around the world," Querin said with a bit of mock smugness.

"The last thing I did was The Devil's Disciple. I did a lot of understudying there. I was their cover, go-to guy. I had, like, 14 covers in one season," Querin said.

"As a result, Micheal is moving most of the furniture in our play," Miller joked.

"Or tripping and falling," Querin added.

I Love You is not a straight storyline with four characters, but a series of vignettes about love relationships of all types.

"In this play, we are multitudinous characters. I am Man One," Querin said.

"On my contract, it's the other way around," Hogeveen cuts in.

There's a bit of song and dance, which Hughes is responsible for making work. He's had a challenge getting it ready.

"There's just tons of music. The harmonies are complicated, but these guys were very good at picking it up fast. That's always the big challenge for me is being able to play it and getting them to sing it right. I can sort of play it, but they can sure sing it," Hughes said.

"He's humble," Miller added.

So, too, is Jennings about her role as director.

"We kind of co-directed," she said of Campbell, who choreographed the play (and directed Sexy Laundry).

If there are two at the top of the food chain, then who wins the arguments that are inevitable?

"She does," Campbell snapped to a round of laughter.

"Yeah," is all Jennings can add.

Campbell and Jennings, along with Debbie Collins and Tim Webb, are the principals of Laughoutloud, the company that is producing this year's (and last's) summer theatre season.

Choosing to do this play was not difficult, and maybe a bit of a formula.

"Married Alive was very popular and we felt that this answers the same sort of interest of people who enjoyed Married Alive. It's also based on relationships, it's a musical, it's a comedy, its been produced all around the world, so we thought with a track record like that, it seems like a big crowd pleaser," Campbell said.

Whatever they are doing, it's working. Sexy Laundry more than doubled last year's box office for a season-starting production. They hope I Love You continues the trend.

It just may. Two of the plays from last year, Suds and Married Alive, were so good the company took them on the road, which provided more work for Hogeveen, Frank and Miller.

"I come (to Orillia) because I know the people I work with are going to be amazingly talented and also really fun to work with. Then when you shop it to other people, it's an easy sell. Lots of theatre companies have to save money by bringing in shows and these productions can travel," Miller said.

Frank agrees with that and she likes being here to get these plays off the ground.

"It's nice to come to Orillia. It's a beautiful space and the community has really been quite supportive," Frank said.

But what is it about Orillians that producers of plays pick productions that examine something about relationships? Why do we go to them in such numbers and identify with them?

"Orillians are an introspective group. They are willing to look at themselves, laugh at themselves, celebrate life. I think that's maybe why a show (like) Sexy Laundry did a lot of similar things that way. It ignites people's emotions to see bits of their life up on the stage and go 'I'm not just an isolated person living in a bubble. We all go through the same problems, I have friends up there,'" Campbell said.

I Love You You're Perfect Now Change has 2 p.m. matinees Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, with evening performances on Wednesdays and Thursdays. There are also evening performances July 8, 16 and 22.

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