



Debbie Collins and Brian Paul get a little help from an instruction manual in *Sexy Laundry*.

Funny and meaty

Sexy Laundry, now playing at the Opera House, has got something in it for anyone who's ever been in a relationship, says the director

By John Swartz, Special To The Packet & Times

Posted 23 hours ago

We're going to depart from the usual format and combine a review with a story about the first play of the summer theatre season at the Opera House.

Sexy Laundry is, without any doubt, the funniest play that has been performed in the Opera House in the last 16 years.

There is nothing that came to mind as being as funny from start to finish as this one.

Three things combine to make it a great experience.

Canadian playwright Michele Riml wrote an interesting play to begin with. Actors Debbie Collins and Brian Paul made it come to life.

"My character's name is Alice Lane, been married for 25 years to Henry and we are here at this gorgeous hotel called the L, the Haute L, get it?" said Collins on the set the day before opening night. They act out the script in a beautiful set created by Tim Webb. Webb first came to attention here in Orillia when he designed the set for *Cats* many years ago. He has created many since, including all the

sets from last season. He'll also create the sets for the remaining plays this season.

It's dominated by a bed. Truthfully, Webb could be an interior decorator with this sets as his calling card.

In one scene, Paul gets too involved with a remote that controls the TV, stereo and lights. Without the bed, it just wouldn't work.

"I don't care much for the situations Henry's put into, but that's what makes the play," Paul said.

"I wouldn't like to have to go through what Henry goes through. They are going through a time in their marriage when things are being re-evaluated and we don't know what will come out the other side." "The couple has checked in for a weekend getaway, except each has their own concept of the real purpose for being there." "We are trying to spice things up, so we have our Sex For Dummies handbook and we're trying to find the passion that we seemed to have lost once life gets in the way. I think the material in this will really say a lot to many people in terms of relationships," Collins said.

They argue — boy, do they argue — but then they throw out a line that turns everything around into a laughable situation, for us. There was one point, though, that Collins uttered a line that cracked them both up.

That's the beauty of this production; director Dave Campbell let Collins and Paul bring their own interpretations into it. There wasn't a blown punchline the whole night. Collins and Paul have the pace and timing down just right.

"It's interesting to direct because it's so real life-y," Campbell said.

Campbell said this play is made for the audience the Laugh Out Loud production team (Campbell, Webb, Collins and Candace Jennings) has developed in just one year: a mature audience that is ready for a little more substance than a run-of-the-mill musical.

"I think for anybody in any kind of a relationship, watching these people trying desperately to communicate and failing, even though they are trying; they can't seem to get the message across to each other," will be instructive, Campbell said.

Despite the title and the warning that the play is not suitable for anyone under the age of 15, there isn't anything risqué other than the ideas going on. There is only one instance of a four-letter word being used, even though it comes out as two, two letter words and all the clothes stay on.

So what's with the title then?

"I don't want to give away the titular lines. You discover that in the play. It's a vital part, it's absolutely there. Nobody does any laundry on stage. I guess we air our dirty laundry," Paul said.

In the back story, Henry is an engineer. If you happen to know an engineer or two, you know they have a great grasp of everything on paper, and often get flustered by the real world, the nuance of things and people.

"That probably describes him quite well. That is really a very apt description of what is going on for him in this play," Paul said.

This leads to some hilarious takes on the literal meaning of what has just been said, and what was actually intended.

For instance, and you have to see this for yourself to truly appreciate what happens, Alice asks Henry to tell her his fantasy. We all know what she means — his sexual fantasy. What comes out of his mouth could only come from a mind that is trained to be an engineer.

You truly will die laughing at that one.

Paul was last seen here in last year's Married Alive. Before that, he was in the Sunshine Festival's Lend Me A Tenor, which is a top-five funny play to have been produced here.

At the time of Lend Me a Tenor, another play was done, Pirates of Penzance, which brought Dave Campbell onto our radar.

"Oh, gosh. I haven't done anything in years. There have been a few things since Pirates, 50 or 60 shows, but..."

He's been on this side of the stage predominantly. Aside from working here in Orillia, he does theatre in

Florida during the winter (some television productions, too). He's working on a new play, Round Heeled Woman with Sharon Gless (Cagney and Lacey).

"At the end of September when we are done here, we are going to fly to London (England) and then we are remounting that show. The idea is to move it to (the) West End," Campbell said.

In the meantime, he feels fortunate to have discovered Sexy Laundry.

"It's a truly excellent piece of writing and I think it's just recently started to get notoriety. The author is just starting to getting noticed. I think a lot of people are picking up on it because they realize it's an intriguing piece to work with," Campbell said.

"The take on what's on the page and how you decide to play it is so open to interpretation, so we were able to work as a group and decide how we were going to tell Alice and Henry's story. It could be a non-stop fight from beginning to end, but that wouldn't be very interesting. That would be like being at home."

Yeah, sunny is better. Sexy Laundry runs to June 25. Get tickets at the Opera House box office, 326-8011. The Flex Pac deal, four shows for \$104, is still on, too.