

## Theater Review: Tenderness and Black Comedy Make Strange Bedfellows

By Jim Lowe

BURLINGTON — Maura Campbell’s intimate drama “Cleaning Day” and Stephen Goldberg’s ridiculously black comedy “Don and Tom” seem an unlikely pairing, but Green Candle Theatre Company did just that with “Sacred & Profane” — and it proved to be fascinating and most entertaining theater at Wednesday’s opening night performance at the Off Center for the Dramatic Arts.



Campbell, a Burlington playwright who grew up in Randolph, created “Cleaning Day,” one of her first efforts, some 21 years ago. When Jenny arrives at the home of elderly Iona with a disposable overall, it becomes apparent she is there to clean up after the recent suicide of Iona’s husband.

Throughout the day, Jenny and Iona discuss their very different lives, gradually bonding — also gradually revealing Iona’s dark secret.

Campbell’s dialogue is intimate and authentic in feel, as is the story with its most unexpected but completely believable denouement. Directed by the playwright, Tracey Girdich as Iona and Geneva MacPhail as Jenny, two of Burlington’s best actresses, make it compelling and touching.

Goldberg’s “Don and Tom,” about the same age as Campbell’s play, is a nasty bit of goods — and all the better for it.

Don and Tom are psychotic killers on death row — but how they got there is all the fun. Tom waxes eloquent about his “joyful” childhood, excusing his parents’ misunderstanding him. His parents appear to bear testament to just how awful his treatment by them was — and you really cannot imagine how bad.

Tom denies that he killed them — but he has been convicted. We know less about Don. Although he denies it, he has been convicted of raping and murdering a little girl. Quite psychotic, he thinks he remembers it, and then he doesn’t. He also has delusions about how he and Tom are going to escape and the private airline they are going to operate.

They are visited by the cynical psychiatrist, Tom’s parents, Tom’s girlfriend (at least in his own mind) and, finally, the even more cynical priest who has come to support their move into the next world.

Sound funny? But it is, terribly so. That, in part, is due to the authenticity of Don and Tom’s neuroses. But really it’s that everything is so bad you cannot imagine it getting any worse — yet it does, all told with Goldberg’s inimitable wit.

The production, directed by the playwright, benefits from two extraordinary performances by two Burlington actors. Alex Dostie’s performance as Tom recalls some of history’s great comedians, from Stan Laurel to Woody Allen. Dostie’s projected innocence makes this character ridiculously funny.

Aaron Masi’s Don is of a rougher variety, someone who casually offers to twist Tom’s neck off. But, inside, he’s the softy of the two, just looking for love — and willing to kill for it. The two interact beautifully and hilariously.

They are supported by some fun caricatures. Girdich and Ben Ash play Tom’s wonderfully awful parents; Peter Keegan is the sociopathic psychiatrist; MacPhail is Tom’s denying “girlfriend”; and Ash does double duty as the evangelical priest. It’s great fun — in a sick kind of way.

Strangely enough, “Sacred & Profane” — these two most disparate plays — proved a most satisfying evening of theater.