

# My recent visit to the Shaw Festival

Getting Married is not recommended - the play that is

Life is too short to devour \$15 hard-poached Eggs Benedict for breakfast at the picturesque Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club restaurant. Or, for that matter, sit through an aimless, two-hour-plus, dated Shaw rant for \$169.51 a seat. Sadly, despite decent acting, **Getting Married** fails to live up to its billing as "a timeless, laugh-out-loud Shaw comedy about marriage" (unless perhaps you think that a military bachelor, in this case an Army General repeatedly tripping over a chair is hilarious). Despite programme promises, this is not "a timeless comedy" and, for me, does not show "Bernard Shaw at his best."

Bringing this fossil back to life for the fifth time in over 50 years may well be of historical interest to some of Shaw scholars and enthusiasts, but at these prices and for the general public, it is probably more a negative than positive experience for many theatre-goers.

I overheard one of the few youthful attendees mutter "what did we just see?" while leaving the Royal George theatre. What indeed? Ironically, the best part of the production, appeared after the last act when the talented actors did a collective, entertaining, joyous, ten-person-mini-dance while the audience applauded. Alas, if only the whole performance could have been equally as entertaining.

As a long-time Shaw Festival supporter, I actually hope that this may be it's last appearance. It has historical relevance, but the rather threadbare plot and Shaw's endless machinations over the now-archaic social mores of the times are not likely to satisfy today's theatre-goers who see this production.

Having said that, the production does have its supporters. For instance, respected theatre critic blogger Lyn Slotkin says that "it's a scintillating, smart, hilarious interpretation of Bernard Shaw's prickly play on marriage. everything about Tanja Jacobs' production is dandy." Meanwhile, J. Kelly Nestruck at the Globe & Mail says that "it remains an entertaining excavation of the old institution." While this production may appeal to seasoned theatre critics, I doubt that it will be relished by an audience less familiar with Shaw. And that, my friends, is the future. I hope that the Shaw Festival will focus on productions that appeal to a wider, age-diverse audience and perhaps put these "classics" into a smaller theatre space.

On the other hand, there is **The Ladykillers**. Here is another not-quite-so-old chestnut from the 1955 film starring Alec Guinness.. Tony Aspler, my London-born co-critic at Vintage Assessments, enjoyed it. While I found it to be quite amusing, it was perhaps just a tad too SILLY for me in a slap-stick Three Stooges sort of way. It may or may not be your cup of tea, but at least, you know what you are in for. It all takes place in the much larger Festival theatre with a grand set and a talented cast of actors led by an outstanding performance by Damien Atkins as the robber-ring-leader, Professor Marcus. As The St. Catharines Standard reviewer John Law says, it's "goofy, but grandly executed."

Take advantage of a Shaw promo on Sunday, September 15 and September 22 (at 7pm) using the the DEAL promo code that gives you \$45.20 for all seating, even for premium orchestra seats that are \$135.60. As there are no performances on Monday, out-of-town visitors may decide to drive home after the 2 hour and 20 minute production.

We also saw **The Russian Play** a 40-minute lunchtime one-act drama at the Royal George theatre. It's lively, gripping and very well performed. This tough and gritty award-winning play by Hannah Moscovitch will definitely catch your attention - no boring monologues here. While the content may not be for everyone, it is worth seeing. Here are the deals: on Saturday September 21 (11:30am) and Friday October 11 (11:30am) all seating can be booked now on line (using the DEAL promo code) at \$20 + HST.

Finally, we booked tickets for **Man & Superman** for opening day for only \$79.10 using the deal (vs. \$187.58 for the same row 7 orchestra seats). Unfortunately, it includes the rarely performed Act three (**Don Juan in Hell**) meaning that the whole performance is just over six hours with a 75-minute break for lunch. Shaw must be shouting "hell-elujah" for its inclusion, but for me his unending loquacious rants no longer resonate. The world and mankind has changed (and not for the better) and in a way that Shaw could never have imagined. As a result, it seems to have neutered the utility of all the conflicting views that Shaw presents in Don Juan as we roll towards our own man-made hell on earth. I enjoyed Man and Superman and wish that the Don Juan sequence would just disappear. Mind you, Gray Powell's remarkable performance as Tanner is worth the price of admission alone.

Here are the deals: Friday September 13 (11am) \$70 Blue seating; Saturday September 28 (11am) \$70 Blue seating; Saturday October 5 (11am) \$50 Blue & Purple seating.

[Click here to visit Michael Vaughan's website Vintage Assessments.](#)