



Thursday, February 11, 2016

by Robin Wood

Theatre UAF's edgy 'Closer' pushes boundaries

FAIRBANKS — The story begins when an accident leads to a happenstance meeting between a failing author and a stripper, but what follows is a coiled web of sex, lies, love and two-timing — often portrayed through graphic language.

An independent and successful photographer and a sex-addicted dermatologist round out the characters of “Closer,” University of Alaska Fairbanks Theatre’s current production.

Patrick Marber wrote the provocative and edgy play, and subsequent movie by the same name, while theatre-department senior Ian Buoncore is directing the local production for his directorial thesis project.

Taking to the stage are fellow theatre-department seniors Katrina Kuharich and Mallory Smyth, department alum Andrew Cassel and Brandi Larson — a graduate of UAF’s biology department now studying theatre.

“It’s a play about connections,” Buoncore said, but also “disconnection, or changing as someone grows.”

The whole play spans almost five years, and each of the 12 scenes is separated by chunks of time ranging from one day to a year and a half.

“Each scene we see the beginnings or ends of relationships,” Buoncore continued.

Events unfold at a photo shoot, an aquarium, an art gallery, and, among others, a sex chatroom on the internet. Scene six, just before intermission, is one of the play’s big climaxes, described by Buoncore as “a juicy moment.”

Despite the varied scene locations, Buoncore said he wanted to rely on a minimalist background for his main-stage directing debut.

“I wanted something solely character driven — really heavy hitting dialogue, good character development. Just something you can really sink your teeth into.”

Buoncore said he’s grateful for the rare opportunity to direct such a renowned play while working directly with faculty from the theatre department.

“Students don’t usually get to direct such main-stage shows. Ian has worked really hard,” Andrew Cassel said. According to Cassel, “Closer” will direct the audience toward a state of self-reflection: “What does it mean to be happy and content in a relationship? How do we relate to our partners when we’re living with them and loving them?”

Cassel also said it’s uncommon and exciting for UAF Theatre to produce such a modern piece with strong adult themes and content. “There’s language, but this really gets into some tough emotional situations,” he said.

Portraying tough emotional situations will be Brandi Larson’s first task on stage, as she has never acted before. Larson said theatre-goers should be able to relate to the characters’ perseverance, not just their turmoil.

“These people have worked really hard for where they are,” she said.

Larson first fell in love with the theatre during her senior year of biology studies, “(I) had the theatre class to look forward to, kept me on track for finishing my degree.”

Larson plays the photographer, Anna, who she said feels empowered and free, possibly for the first time in her life. But, “She gets caught up between two guys. She feels like she can have both,” a balancing act that ends up collapsing.

She said “Closer” can come off a bit dark, but even the worst things that happen to people can have a sliver of humor. Ultimately, she said characters “find the hope that everything’s gonna be OK, even if it’s not.”

Cassel’s character, Larry, has parallels to his own life — Larry finds out the girl he thought loved him has been seeing someone else for almost a year, “it always sort of hits me personally after that,” he said.

Cassel advises against seeing “Closer” if “there is any problem in your relationship that you don’t want to talk about.”

However, the play may be aptly suited for one niche demographic, Cassel continued, “Closer” is “a perfect anti-valentines day play.”



Top: Brandi Larson as Anna, Andrew Cassel as Larry.

Right: Mallory Smyth as Dan, Katrina Kuharich as Alice.

Photos by Kade Mendelowitz

IF YOU GO

Who: Theatre UAF

What: Closer

When: February 12-21, 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sunday the 21.

Where: Salisbury Theatre, 311 Tanana Drive in UAF’s Fine Art Complex

Cost: Advanced purchase from uaf.edu/theatre-film: \$8 students; \$12 seniors, military, UAF staff;

\$16 adults; \$2 service fee added at the door.

FYI: Strong sexual content and language, intended for mature audiences only.

Cast

Katrina Kuharich as Alice

Mallory Smyth as Dan

Andrew Cassel as Larry

Brandi Larson as Anna

Crew

Ian Buoncore — director

Carl Sage — scenic designer

Jerene Mosier — costume designer

Kade Mendelowitz — lighting designer

Richard Atkin — sound designer

Ariana Polanco — stage manager

Elsbeth Cheyne, Emily Ross, Jonilee Polanco — assistant stage managers