

Northern Light Theatre plays cops and robbers

Hard Sell investigates everything from severe depression to sexual discrimination, all while taking a comedic twist on role-playing

Hard Sell

Directed by Trevor Schmidt
Starring Dave Clarke and Mark Stubbings
Runs until 18 March
The Third Space

BRYAN SAUNDER
Arts & Entertainment Staff

As the lights rise on the brilliantly thought-out set of *Hard Sell*, the eyes of the audience are treated to a now clichéd scene: an interrogation room, dimly lit, with two police officers standing over a seated suspect.

Hard Sell, however, is anything but clichéd.

A dark comedy exploring the nature of power and those who abuse it, *Hard Sell* is a fresh, witty and inventive creation. The suspect, a trophy wife named Kate Devoe, is being questioned about the shooting death of her husband Jamie. All throughout the questioning, however, she utters not a word. After all, Kate is played by a mannequin.

This silence frustrates Sergeant Filth (Dave Clarke) and Constable Pig (Mark Stubbings); especially Filth, an obviously sexually frustrated officer on the verge of retirement. Driven mad by Kate's beauty and determined to solve his last case before he turns in his badge, Filth uses interrogation methods of questionable legality in an attempt to get Kate to say something. Anything.

By contrast, Constable Pig is young, repressed and interrogated by the book. He believes that Kate has been silent for hours not because she's



guilty but because she's in a state of trauma. He tells Kate that he understands and that when she's ready to talk, he's ready to listen.

While the idea of a good cop and a bad cop being forced to work together is nothing new, the direction that the play takes next is completely unexpected. In an attempt to get Kate to talk and shed some light on the case, the two officers start role-playing. Sergeant Filth plays the part of Kate's husband, Jamie, and Constable Pig plays the part of one of his associates.

Gradually, the two officers take on the characters of everyone even remotely connected to case and act out the sequence of events leading up to the death of Jamie. The result is hilarious and both the actors rise to the challenge superbly, lending a realistic emotional depth to the personas of all the characters they play. The occasional overacting is always hysterical and almost always appropriate. While there's one emotional scene where Stubbings seems in a rush to return to being funny, both Stubbings and Clarke

expertly toy with the audience's heartstrings.

When the audience isn't being touched by a poignant line, they're either gasping in horror or gasping for breath. The humour is shocking, dark and vulgar. Even so, the oldest ladies in the audience titter at the filthiest of jokes. This is because despite being horrifying, the humour also carries an inherent honesty.

Hard Sell doesn't rely on elaborate costumes, fancy sets, or complicated lighting setups to carry the play. The costumes are basic but revealing of

the characters, the set is simple but creative and the lighting is minimal but effective.

Finally, despite the fact that *Hard Sell* is a non-stop side-splitting comedy, it doesn't lack meaning. While putting a new spin on tired stereotypes *Hard Sell* tackles every issue in the book, from severe depression to spousal abuse to racial and sexual discrimination and stereotypes. Moreover, it tackles all these while maintaining its artistic integrity and originality. And it tackles all these while at the same time being funny.



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