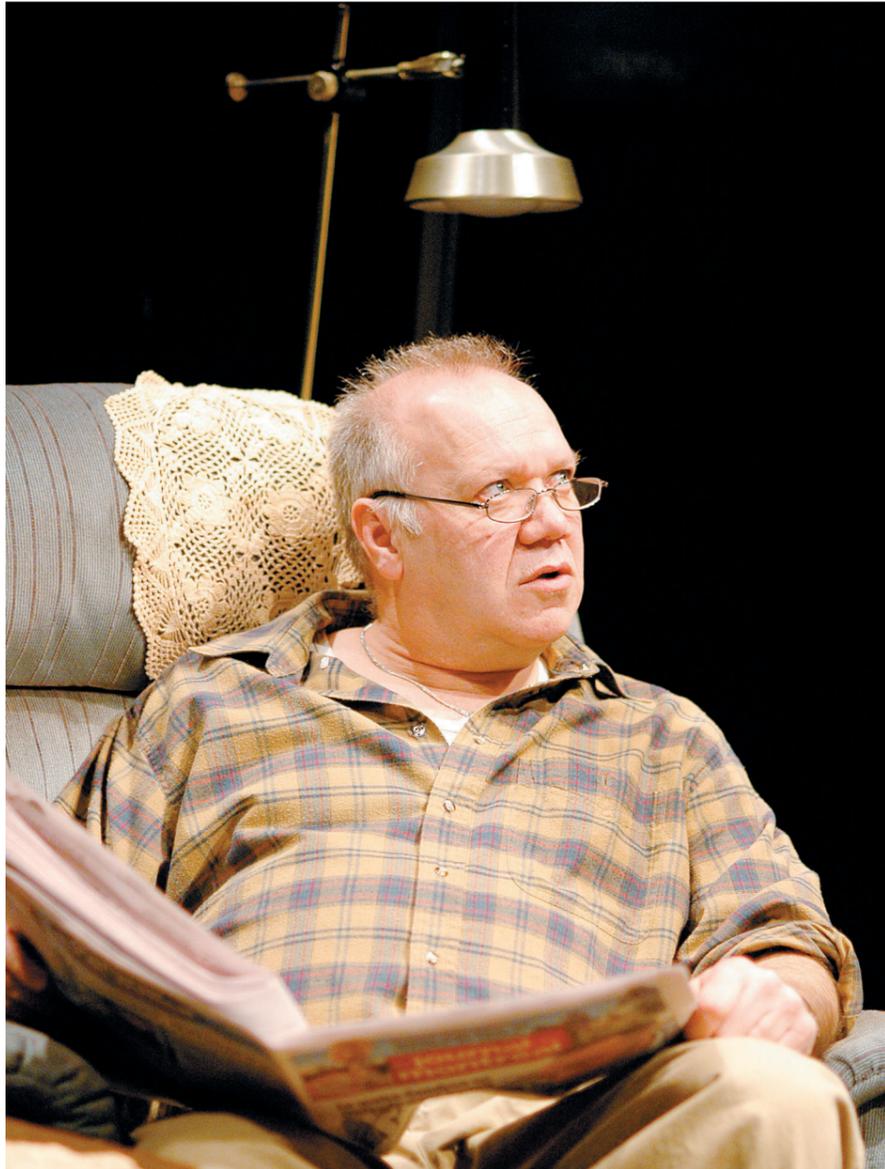


December Man deserves its flurry of applause

Playwright Colleen Murphy turns tragedy into powerful, emotional theatre with her post-crisis account of a school shooting



TARA STIEGLITZ

AFTER THE VIOLENCE STOPPED *The December Man* explores the aftermath of a tragedy.

theatre review

The December Man

Runs until 23 March

Written by Colleen Murphy

Directed by Micheline Chevrier

Starring Jeff Irving, Nicola Lipman, and Brian

Dooley

Citadel Theatre

BRYAN SAUNDERS

Arts & Entertainment Staff

The type of audience that frequents the Citadel's Rice Theatre tends to be a fairly critical and discerning crowd. Generally, it's made up of people who've seen a lot of theatre and who are hoping to see a fresh, exciting, and moving play.

It is noteworthy, then, that the opening night of the Citadel Theatre's run of *The December Man* ended with a standing ovation.

While this highest praise is sometimes given out like candy at other theatres, standing ovations at the Rice are few and far between, and only given to the most deserving productions.

This particular show is set entirely in the living room of a family home—and appropriately so, because *The December Man* explores how the lives of family are affected after a calamity of monumental proportions. In this case, the tragedy is the 1989 École Polytechnique Massacre, but the issues that this play explores are far reaching.

Jean (Jeff Irving), one of the 50 men ordered out of a classroom before gunman Marc Lépine shot the nine women that remained, is also the only son of Kathleen (Nicola Lipman) and Benoit (Brian Dooley). He's the first one in his family to ever attend university and holds the family's future and hopes in his hands. But Jean's a wreck in the days following the shooting, battling with survivor's guilt in the wake

of a massacre that claimed 14 innocent lives. He blames himself for not doing more to save the now-dead women, but mostly, Jean blames himself for not standing up to the gunman when he was ordered to leave the room.

Playing the role of Jean, Irving's acting is admittedly hit or miss at times. However, the occasional miss isn't a product of Irving not putting enough into his role, but just the opposite: playwright Colleen Murphy has already put so much emotion into the dialogue that whenever Irving tries to add to it, it seems over-the-top. When Irving does find the right amount of emotion required of him, his acting hits hard—often sending the audience into tears.

Like any good drama, *The December Man* isn't just a sob-fest, but has its share of laughs as well. Jean's exceedingly Catholic mother Kathleen provides much of the necessary comic relief. Furthermore, Lipman provides these laughs while expertly maintaining the honesty in her character. The many audience members who grew up with such a mother will be doubled over with laughter when they see her up on the stage.

There's also Dooley, playing the role of Jean's loving-but-alcoholic father, Benoit. As the hard-working, blue-collar Benoit, Dooley steals the show. The expert actor's years of theatre experience are obvious through the emotion behind every line he delivers, and the dynamic depth with which he portrays his character. Because of this, one can only hope that Dooley makes a return to the Edmonton theatre scene sometime very soon.

In addition to the attention-grabbing characters and the touchingly honest dialogue, playwright Colleen Murphy has laced her script with an abundance of symbolism. Set and costume designer John Ferguson and lighting designer Erec Hassell pick up on this and do an excellent job of maintaining and adding to what Murphy has already created. With so much talent, it's hardly a surprise that the opening night of *The December Man* ended with the audience on its feet.

Bank Job's sly cast gets handcuffed to bad script

film review

The Bank Job

Directed by Roger Donaldson

Starring Jason Statham, Saffron Burrows, Richard Lintern, and Daniel Mays

RAMIN OSTAD

Arts & Entertainment Staff

I have to admit, I've never really been one to enjoy movies that are based on true stories; most biopics tend to bore me numb. But I held out hope for *The Bank Job*, Roger Donaldson's period caper about some low-level cockney skullduggers who rob a bank. Unfortunately, the film does nothing more than give us a lesson in mediocrity.

The Bank Job is loosely based on the so-called "walkie-talkie bank job" of 1971, during which a ham-radio operator picked up the two-way communication between a lookout and some burglars who had tunneled into Lloyd's Bank in Central London.

In the film version, within the bank is a safety deposit box that happens to

contain naughty photographs of one Princess Margaret.

The decision to rob the bank comes from MI6, who order their man Tim (Richard Lintern) to acquire the photographs. He then makes a deal with his lover Martine (Saffron Burrows) to get her out of trouble from a drug bust if she puts together a gang to rob the bank. Martine goes to her old stomping grounds and recruits Terry Leather, played by British-gangster-flick regular Jason Statham. Terry and his two friends, Kevin and Dave, are unaware of Martine's play for the photographs, and allowing their ambition to outweigh their fear, they devise a plan to rob the bank.

The plot does thicken, since almost every shady character in London has an incriminating safety deposit box inside Lloyd's Bank. This includes a mob boss who pays off corrupt cops, a brothel owner who tends to high-ranking members of parliament, and real-life gangster and Black Power leader Michael X—who just happens to be the one who snapped those photos of our dear Princess. These characters all tie into the main story decently, except for Michael X, who doesn't quite fit with the rest of the puzzle.



The most interesting part of any heist film, besides how the anti-heroes get away, is how they pull off the robbery in the first place, and the problem with *The Bank Job* is that none of these guys seem smart enough to know how to rob a bank, and they admit it regularly throughout the film. Keep in mind, this is 1971 with no Internet: they rely on an extra hand to figure out the mechanics of it, but never quite explain how he knows what to do. Then there's

the fact that they appear to tunnel underground for a city block in the span of a single night.

The inevitable and drawn-out getaway is confusing and also seriously lacking in any kind of credible explanation. There should never be a point in a heist flick where a character has no idea how they escaped, especially when the audience agrees. When you compare *The Bank Job* to a film like *Ocean's 11*, you realize that there could have been so much more to all

of this.

While the writing is dull, the acting is fairly sharp. You never feel like the aged bond between these thieves is phony, and there are some particularly funny moments that would have flopped without the perfect delivery they were given. It's sad that Statham willingly relegates himself to these types of films, since the guy has serious talent. Unfortunately, the only thing *The Bank Job* will rob is your twelve shillings.