

Red Deer Players on the mark with Mass Appeal

By Mark Weber - Red Deer Express

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The Red Deer Players have served up another theatrical powerhouse with Mass Appeal, currently being staged at the Scott Block theatre downtown. Featuring the exceptionally talented duo of Paul Boulton and Jason Steele, performances run through to Feb. 20th with curtain at 8 pm. There is also a matinee set for Feb. 14th at 2 p.m. The show, which was written by Bill C. Davis, is being directed by Lori Lane who was also at the helm of last year's terrific rendition of Twelve Angry Men - also presented by the Red Deer Players. Mass Appeal deals with the relationship between Father Tim Farley, an experienced parish priest and a young seminarian by the name of Mark Dolson, who relentlessly tries to rock the boat, challenging an overly comfortable congregation, and chip away at what he sees as obstacles to true growth and progression in the modern church. Farley has, however, come to greatly value his status in the parish and ultimately, he knows how to handle the folks to keep them satisfied via a comparatively middle of the road approach. Immediately, when the men are put together in a mentoring relationship, there is a stark and constant friction between the two as they meet on a weekly basis. But there is also an almost immediate connection between the men - a 'bond' even. Boulton shines as Father Tim - I cannot imagine a better choice for the part - he captures the nuances of Farley's character beautifully - from deep sincerity to a razor sharp wit to raw emotional complexity. Boulton can simply be counted on to bring his best to every performance he commits to; he's a mesmerizing dramatic force onstage. Steele is also terrific as Dolson, a character who is so absolutely honest and relatively transparent that it's jarring to those around him. Steele is a gifted actor, able to nail just the right amount of cynicism without pushing it too far; and in a blink gone is the fierce attitude and brashness and in its place is a warm-hearted sincerity and vulnerability. Much credit also has to go to Lane - I don't know exactly how she does it, but again, like with Twelve Angry Men, she has drawn out the finest in her cast and melded a tremendous balance of humour and poignancy. The wonderfully written play moves along briskly but it isn't rushed - there is ample time to savour all that it offers on a number of levels. Lane had pointed out that the heart of the play is really about relationship - where one is the teacher, or helper or source of guidance and the other is primarily the learner. Of course, the tables are often turned - as we indeed see glimmers of with Farley. In the most important ways - he finds his way back 'home'. But the path along the way is fascinating to behold. It's also an inspirational journey - from the story's start to finish. For tickets and more information, check out www.reddeerplayers.com. Tickets are also available at Sunworks or at the door. editor@reddeerexpress.com

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