

Sisters was stunning

March 28, 2008



We met at Armstrong's Centennial Theatre, and spent the night inside Mary Buchanan's mind. Her memories' rooms — the setting for Wendy Lill's *Sisters* — were an unpleasant and sometimes awful place to be, but like a car crash, we couldn't take our eyes away.

Directed by Salmon Arm's Lois Archer-Duell and produced by Darryl Bennett, Asparagus Community Theatre's production opened Wednesday to a small but speechless audience.

Sisters starts with Mary (Bree Ann Trumbley) as a teenage girl in 1950s Eastern Canada. She doesn't want to marry high school boyfriend Louis (Sean Bibby), she wants to share the love of God.

In the middle of the stage, an older Mary, Sister Mary, is at a Nova Scotia Indian residential school along with two other nuns.

Sister Agnes (Aileen Brand), the ruler-wielding sort, and Sister Gabriel (Laurisa Defehr), the Sound of Music-singing sort, debate their role as teachers with Mary, whose views are somewhere in the middle.

At the stage's right, it's 1969 and Mary (now played by Kaila Sinclair) is in jail, being asked by lawyer Joel Stein (Cory McIntosh) why she burned the school down. Like a child who has just learned to ask "Why?" and won't stop, McIntosh is relentless and annoying — the perfect lawyer.

Throughout this two-act play, the spotlight and conversations fly in and out of each era, mimicking the arsonist Mary's wild flashbacks as she recalls her version of life before and inside a residential school.

If the actors and stagehands' timing weren't impeccable, the drama of *Sisters* would have fallen, but they were.

All of *Sisters*' women were dealing with justifying their well-intended but perhaps wicked work at the residential school. None of the roles could have been easy.

They screamed, as loud as your mother in your worst teenage fight; lost their minds, hearing voices and seeing inanimate objects; and prayed, for different things but always in succession, like a melody.

They were all, and at the same time, absolutely staggering.

Sisters is on stage at the Centennial Theatre in Armstrong tonight and Saturday and Wednesday to April 5 with the curtain opening at 8 p.m. Tickets, \$12.50 for adults and \$8 for students, are available at The Guy Next Door, or by calling 546-0950.

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