

# The Clockmaker keeps you guessing, for a time

By Cam Fuller, The StarPhoenix January 17, 2015



**Charlie Peters and Jamie-Lee Shebelski are part of the fourperson cast of The Clockmaker.**

**Photograph by: Richard Marjan, The StarPhoenix , The StarPhoenix**

Time flies in *The Clockmaker*, a play that tick-tocks past the 90-minute mark without you even noticing.

It moves fast because it's intriguing and engaging. Rather than telling a conventional romance, playwright Stephen Massicotte arranges the scenes so they seem out of order and perhaps even in different dimensions, giving the characters a constant sense of *déjà vu*.

There's also a mystery. Charlie Peters, as clockmaker Heinrich Mann, finds himself being questioned by a bureaucrat. Johnna Wright's direction brings out the comedy here. Madame Pierre (Jamie Lee Shebelski) expertly lets the nervous man, seated in a wobbly chair but too afraid to call it uncomfortable, blurt things out that are unintentionally self-incriminating. For example, by denying adultery and especially murder, he's somehow admitting to adultery.

Enter Frieda (Alex Hartshorn) who needs a clock fixed. She and Heinrich are apparent strangers, but there's something between the two that remains agonizingly out of reach.

This much we do know: Frieda is the victim of a beastly husband (Grahame Kent as Adolphus) who takes his belt to her in one disturbing scene. Instantly established as repulsive, Adolphus is first seen eating an onion and, with his fingers, sardines out of a can. After the beating, he couldn't be more sorry; you can see the cycle of abuse starting to repeat. Kent is convincing enough that you really, really don't like him.

Frieda and Heinrich's blossoming romance is the heart of the play, and it's delightful because the two are so innocent and the acting so good. Peters invests Heinrich with an endearing quality and you can't help but put yourself in his position when he's intimidated by authority and then cheer on his increasing confidence.

And Hartshorn is nothing less than a revelation as Frieda, an actor with great emotional range, fresh and naive in some scenes and haunted and troubled in others. At Friday's opening, she was completely in the moment and delivered a magnetic, flawless performance.

Jenna Maren's interesting set, unlike the flow of the play, is linear: the clock shop at one end, the interrogation table in the middle, the home of Frieda and Adolphus at the other end, set against shipping pallets to make it look rundown. There's a bit of magic as well, when an umbrella appears to give shelter from the rain.

The story can be frustrating to follow because key details are maddeningly withheld. And since we're dealing with the concept of time, even when it's over, it takes awhile to realize what seemed to have happened. But it comes, it just takes time.

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