

THEATRE REVIEW

Departures arrives awkwardly

BY KIRSTIN E. ENDEMANN

Carol Shield's 1988 play *Departures and Arrivals* is set in an airport for a reason. As a journalist character explains: "If you stand in an airport lounge long enough, eventually the whole world will pass you by."

In a series of humorous yet touching vignettes, the hopes, fears and loves of more than 22 characters are revealed as they pass through the lounge.

Shields, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Stone Diaries*, is known for her quiet insight. That approach is evident through the play produced by Kanata Theatre. However, *Departures* — first mounted in 1988 by the student theatre at the University of Manitoba, where Shields is on staff — is also a comic ensemble romp, reminiscent of old *Second City* and *Saturday Night Live* sketches.

The vast array of characters arriving

and then disappearing — too soon for some, not soon enough for others — is charming for a moment, but becomes wearying after more than an hour (Kanata's production runs more than two-and-a-half hours). After that length of time, the audience becomes fed up with the two-dimensional people they're meeting and wants to get involved with the characters. That chance never arrives. It becomes easy to lose interest.

This dilemma becomes most apparent in the second act, when scenes with characters without substance drag on for too long. This is partially the fault of some poor casting and production choices by director Heather Walt, and partly the fault of the script. The judicious cutting of lines would have made the play's length and content more accessible.

Overall, Kanata Theatre's production is quite enjoyable with Rob Mitchell's subtly tick-tocking original score evoking the feeling of waiting, a set complete with luggage carousel and some utterly inspired acting.

The scene depicting two women buying life insurance policies for their husbands was exquisite: Mary Holmes is a perfect combination of prudishness and mischief as she and Gwen Knight reveal their detailed plans if — “God forbid” — they were ever to become widows.

Mark Bazerman and Bob Carey, playing two identically dressed men in a chance encounter, brought just the right innuendo of sweet sexuality to their scene as they coyly used their matching suitcases as a metaphor ~~(about what magical realm left in~~

fer). In fact, Bazerman easily stole every scene he was in, be it as a primary character or in simple walk-ons.

Knight also shines as she gives insight into the life and plight of "LOL"s — little old ladies — in an utterly enjoyable scene. In fact, what is great about this play is its depiction of middle-aged and older men and women as vital human beings.

But problems stand out in Kanata Theatre's production. In the first vignette, a young woman's "monologue" is delivered via a tape recording, as she sits on stage acting out her thoughts. This contradicts the delivery of introspective lines in the opening sequence and undermines the purpose of acting on stage.

On opening night many of the cast were overcome by either a poor command of the script or jitters. Others, notably Erin Ryan when she appeared as the "movie star" and "flight attendant," were just painful to watch as they struggled across the stage.

Departures and Arrivals by Carol Shields is at the Ron Maslin Playhouse, 1 Ron Maslin Way, at 8 p.m. March 21 to March 24 and March 27 to 31. Tickets are \$12, \$9 for seniors and students Wed. and Thurs. For more information call 831-4435