

# Friendship, relationship and ... where's the birthday cake?

By KATHLEEN PALMER

Staff Writer

Most of us have stared down one or more "landmark" birthdays. You know: The ones that start with "The Big" and end in a zero. Each marks its own stage of life, and comes with assumptions, anticipations and possibly regrets. And many of us have used these -0s to evaluate where we are and where we're going.

In Merrimack Repertory Theatre's latest offering, "Out of the City," two couples – Carol and Matt, Jill and Dan – embark on a weekend getaway in the Pocono Mountains, to celebrate Carol's 60th birthday. The marriages are decades-long, as are the friendships. As Carol reflects on her life as she enters her sixth decade, she turns to her best friend Jill to discuss her marriage and her future. The friends share a surprising, revelatory moment, and things are promptly turned on their ear.

The marriages are definitely different. Nebbishy Matt (Grant Shaud – you know him as Miles Silverberg on "Murphy Brown") and Carol (Charlotte Maier) seem to have a matter-of-fact, unsentimental relationship. Matt's sore arm and his inability to throw a rock and hit a log floating in the lake becomes a symbol of his insecurities around his masculinity and role as "provider for the tribe." Carol does her best to shore up his self-esteem, but harbors some slight resentment at the lack of obligatory birthday trappings.

His buddy Dan (Ken Land) is still the virile jock he always was, bent on finding "a court somewhere" to shoot hoops. He doesn't have a problem

## IF YOU GO

**MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE PRESENTS 'OUT OF THE CITY'**

**WHEN:** Through April 12. See website for dates and times.

**WHERE:** Nancy L. Donahue Theatre, 50 E. Merrimack St., Lowell, Mass.

**COST:** \$20-\$60.

**INFORMATION:** 1-978-654-4678, box\_office@mrt.org or www.mrt.org.

hitting the log, of course. His adventurous wife Jill (Kate Levy) is the earthy, outdoorsy type, whose constant traveling without Dan likely help – and hinder – their relationship. There's

definitely more sexual energy between this couple, but as Dan begins to have doubts about Jill's travels and intentions, everything comes under question.

The 90-minute play runs without intermission, which is good for comedy and dialogue-driven stories. There are some hilarious discussions between both sets of friends about sex (Carol uses the phrase "the ... insistence of it" to great effect). And the many iterations, intentions and reactions to kissing are

the comedic impetus for much of the activity.

"The thing that interests me about plays is how things shift just a little bit," said "Out of the City" playwright Leslie Ayzvazian. "That's the thing I pursue all the time. What that little shift does, and the little tilt that it does to the paradigm of a marriage – a solid marriage, a good marriage – to me was worth investigating."

The cast is believable as couples and as friends, and the cues are picked up with lightning speed. This sometimes creates a machine-gun, speed-through feeling to the dialogue, which is often a bit cyclical ("Get the hair dryer!" "The hair dryer?" "The hair dryer!"). But comedy relies on pacing, and it's certainly better to err on the side of too fast. It was also a lovely surprise to see Shaud on a local stage; his Matt was frantic and hilarious.

"Out of the City" runs through April 12, at MRT's home stage, the Nancy L. Donahue Theatre, 50 E. Merrimack St. in downtown Lowell. Tickets range from \$20-\$60, with group, military, student and locals discounts available. For tickets and information, call 1-978-654-4678, email box\_office@mrt.org or visit www.mrt.org.

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Photo courtesy of MEGHAN MOORE

Front row, Carol and Matt (Charlotte Maier and Grant Shaud) and Dan and Jill (Ken Land and Kate Levy) share a weekend in the Poconos - and some revelations - in MRT's production of "Out of the City."

## THEATER REVIEW

flea market

& Book Sale

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Saturday, March 28th, 2015

(Snow date Saturday, April 4th, 2015)

9am-2pm

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