

Warren Gerds/Critic at Large: Review: 'A Trick of the Light' comical and engaging in Fish Creek

by: Warren Gerds

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A play about a guy who can make himself invisible may conjure an image of cute. There is a touch of cute in "A Trick of the Light," but what evolves runs way, way deeper.

As Eddie tries to get a handle on how and why he has acquired his unique impossibility, the audience is pulled along through his analytical/philosophical maze – pretty much laughing all the way.

Much of that last part has to do with one of Eddie's friends, who has a joke for everything. Most are oldies. Often, they are along the line of this: A bomb in a French kitchen is Napoleon blown apart. There are many, many more.

Eventually, the play gets down to considering the difference between the words "vanish" and "disappear." There's a certain level of sophistication that comes with that, making "A Trick of the Light" cute and sophisticated.

This light/dense play is the creation of Peter Moore.

Peninsula Players Theatre gave "A Trick of the Light" its world premiere Tuesday night in the professional company's Theatre in a Garden. Performances continue to July 7.

As the play sets the bar high in its main character, so do the production values in these first performances.

Main character: Eddie is on stage every second.

In this case, Eddie is portrayed by Neil Brookshire, who is so exacting in the role that one's mind finds it difficult to separate the actor from reality.

Of course, Neil Brookshire doesn't really become invisible except in the recesses of one's imagination. The role is akin to masterpiece portraiture for an audience to study, pore over and wonder about for all its nuances of colors, shadings and meanings.



Joe Foust, Neil Brookshire, Noah Simon and Hayley Burgess.
Photo by Len Villano

The role of Eddie is one that professional actors have careers for, and Neil Brookshire is excellent in it.

Production values: There are two main levels. Sitting down, one sees a set of an “other” place – a configuration of straight-line walls that are see-through save for gauze-like surfaces of a uniform blue hue.

Image an ice bar; you know, those places made completely of ice. That is the look of the color. These walls rise and drop, mostly, as scenes change. For most scene changes, actors and set pieces arrive and depart on sliding floor segments.

Eddie merely steps forward, and somebody arrives or departs behind him as he speaks – narrating or delving a niche in his mind. You are not going to see this play presented in such an exacting and imaginative and technically tricky way except in theaters like Peninsula Players Theatre, and there are few like Peninsula Players Theatre.



***Neil Brookshire as Eddie .
(Photo by Len Villano)***

Two side thoughts:

One. The language. It is the thing in contemporary plays to litter the landscape with tough talk and F-bombs. There is no tough or foul language in “A Trick of the Light” – no cursing no profanities. There are double-entendre phrases and not even double-entendre lines (point-blank sexual references), but Peter Moore wrote a play without as much as a “holy cow.” Holy cow!

Two. Along with Neil Brookshire’s performance, there is another one of the why-actors-act category. Hayley Burgess weaves through as four personas. The printed program is a tip-off that she is portraying these roles, but otherwise one would not guess she is a gushy waitress, a world-weary cinema usher, a saucy co-worker and a youthful guru in touch with the cosmos.



***Neil Brookshire and Hayley Burgess .
(Photo by Len Villano)***

Professional actors often are chameleons from play to play; Hayley Burgess is a chameleon in one play through characterization, costuming and wigs. However, a leg tattoo is a tip off to her identity.

Two situations shift the tones of “A Trick of the Light” when other actors are in the mix.

One. When Eddie is with his close friends, the play is like a comedy routine. There is a lot of buddy/buddy playing around with Marty (Noah Simon), who is an actor with a family, and Darrell (Joe Foust), a co-worker who is a jokesmith. The three of them are movie fans, and they set in motion a multitude of classic movie references. Scenes unfold with high-level byplay by actors who know what they are doing. It's like craft baking; these skilled bakers knead just the right ingredients and from the oven arrives a loaf of bread that looks, smells and tastes good.



Cassandra Bissell and Neil Brookshire as Eddie and Beth . (Photo by Len Villano)

Two. When Eddie is with his wife, Beth (Cassandra Bissell), familial, familiar and knowing elements of a couple's life lead toward drama.

As a scientist, Beth is a no-nonsense and definitive person (as is Cassandra Bissell as an actress), so what Eddie is able to do in front of others takes a new direction with her.

In a way, Beth is the whole point of the play – though I'm guessing. What one draws from this play is something of a trick of the light that takes concentration to figure out

Overall, “A Trick of the Light” is a smart play that churns the mind and tickles the funnybone. Peter Moore has fun along the way with concepts of invisibility. One thought is, as they age, men and women become invisible to the next generation. Another is a delight: What if others had Eddie's gift of invisibility, like Amelia Earhart?

Creative: Playwright – Peter Moore; director – Tom Mula; scenic designer – Keith Pitts; costume designer – Rachel Lambert; lighting designer – Stephen Roy White; properties designer – Wendy Huber; sound designer – Christopher Kriz; stage manager – Richelle Harrington Calin; production manager – Cody Westgaard; scenic artist Eileen Rosycki; artistic director – Greg Vinkler; managing director – Brian Kelsey

Cast:

Eddie – Neil Brookshire

Marty – Noah Simon

Darrell – Joe Foust

Beth – Cassandra Bissell

Waitress/Usher/Leslie/Calista – Hayley Burgess

Running time: One hour, 38 minutes (no intermission)

Remaining performances: To July 7 at 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. June 23 and 30 and 4 p.m. July 7

Info: peninsulaplayers.com

RELATED EVENTS: Pre-show discussion for ticketholders, 6:30 p.m. June 20 with playwright. Post-show discussion June 20 with actors, designers and director.