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***I'll Be Back Before Midnight* keeps audiences on edge**

Festival Players' first offering of fourth season full of plot twists

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"There's just something about it," director Sarah Phillips said about the audience appeal of *I'll Be Back Before Midnight*.

It's something that's frightening, but yet alluring that attracts audiences to the most-performed Canadian show, which the Festival Players of Prince Edward County opened at Mt. Tabor last night.

The stage is set as Jan (Sherri McFarlane) and her husband Greg (John Cleland) move into a house in the quiet countryside.

It turns out Jan just got out of a mental hospital, while Greg looks for respite the country – or at least that's how he sells it.

Throughout the Peter Colley-written drama, the audience is drawn to Jan's character and copes with the developments of daily life as she sees them, while trying to figure out if she's seeing things or not.

Jan has to deal with Greg's introduction of his sister Lisa (Tracey Ferencz) whom she never liked nor trusted, and the appearances of landlord George (John Dolan) who is a quirky, friendly farmer with a love of whiskey and an odd affliction for bringing up stories of foul murders and the ghosts that haunt what would be a peaceful home.

The expressive McFarlane does an excellent job showing her emotions as she begins to suspect other people around her for the crazy things she is seeing in her life – ghost sightings, secret plots, and scary noises. She admits that at times, she had a hard time separating her feelings for the drama around her to still entertain.

"It's a bit of a rollercoaster, I'll say," she said. "Jan is real. You can't play her one-note. Generally speaking, she is the victim from the get-go, but she also has her moments of courage and her moments of intelligence."

Upon her first read in Toronto, McFarlane said she was a bit frightened just at the concept of staging the play in such a remote location as Mt. Tabor. Indeed, the plot turns from a laugh to a thriller on a dime, then twists and turns again.

"It's just so twisted," said McFarlane.

Cleland said he found it to be a crazy role to play and said part of the challenge was working to keep some of the mysteries concealed. In the end, though, he thinks audiences will ultimately enjoy the night.

"It's good for a couple of laughs and a couple of screams," he said.

Adding to the drama on stage, the lighting sets the mood well and the sound almost seems to ooze out of the walls of the old church, creating some of the suspense.

"It's a whole other character or two, really," said Phillips. "We're still working on it, but the effects are effective."

She said the selection is really a thriller just for the fun of staging one and fortunately, the cast and crew has bought in as well.

"There seems to be an appreciation for the scare-the-pants-off-you stuff, we're just doing it in the room instead of in a box. It's a little different."

To find out what makes this show so popular and what was responsible for the crazy things Jan saw, visit one of the 22 showings of the play before the curtain closes July 24. For schedules and ticketing, see the web site www.festivalplayers.ca.



HAPPY MOMENTS Greg and Jan Stevenson (played by John Cleland and Sherri McFarlane) were excited about a fresh start in the country, but their new home wasn't quite as relaxing an atmosphere as they discussed in *I'll Be Back Before Midnight*.
(Adam Bramburger/Gazette staff)