

# Fully Clothed pinches flesh of female middle age

## LAST NIGHT

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The world of middle-class Canadian womanhood may never be the same. Last night five gifted sketch comics brought their show *Women Fully Clothed* to the Winter Garden Theatre and unleashed a comedic poke at book clubs, Oprah, preschool board meetings, mother/daughter relationships and "pants that go up above your waist."

There was even an impression of Margaret Atwood. After all, "she's right up there with Stompin' Tom Connors."

The show is the brainchild of Robin Duke (an *SCTV* and *Sat-*

*urday Night Live* alumna) who brought together Jayne Eastwood, Debra McGrath, Kathryn Greenwood and Teresa Pavlinek. It was originally a commissioned piece for a Second City fundraiser for an anti-violence charity.

The comedians liked working together and the creative wheels started turning. Humber College's School of Creative and Performing Arts (disclosure: I teach there) came on board as producer. They toured the show in a few small towns and are now landing it in Toronto.

The quintet have excellent comic pedigree and the show reflects their collective aesthetic. It is far from the brash, in-your-face comedy of the alternative

circuit. If you like your comedy with a streak of mean, *Women Fully Clothed* won't be to your liking. Rather, it's classical sketch comedy. The skits are well-observed, anchored in reality, full of sentiment and heart. The vagaries of motherhood figure prominently. Think prickly comedy with a warm fuzzy centre.

Part of the show's charm lies in the pleasure one gets from watching pure talent at work. The cast is an all-estrogen comedy dream team as Second City veterans and TV mainstays, and their technique and assuredness on stage plays perfectly. And the show, thanks to director John Hemphill, clips along at a pleasing pace. At times on open-

ing night, the cast experienced microphone troubles but these glitches were eventually overcome.

Much of the comedy stems from quirky characters. Three elderly ladies take a canoe trip to scatter a friend's ashes only to learn in her final letter that she was gay. "I knew we were all lesbians," one lady finally decides. "We see each other all the time and we play euchre every Thursday."

In another bit, an over-achieving book club expecting Atwood decides to use drugs to knock out a member who hasn't read her book.

The cast is remarkably uniform in its performances. Pavlinek has a gift for playing per-

plexed outsiders, such as the woman forced to admit she's an "Oprah hating slut" who doesn't buy into the daytime diva's pop psychology. Greenwood is terrific as the tightly wound daughter of a woman unleashing her libido at an open mike night.

Eastwood has an incredible gift of comic timing and gets to deliver many a sketch's punchline. McGrath has great range playing a myriad of diverse characters.

Duke is a comic freight train; she blows through scenes. Her work as a harried psychic (whose husband calls from Loblaw's during her readings) is excellent.

*Women Fully Clothed* runs tonight and Saturday.