



'On The Market' is Grief with "Friends" at The Williamston

REVIEW October 06, 2023 by David Kiley

WILLIAMSTON, MI—There is no time limit on grief. Ask someone who has lost a true love, and they will tell you that it's not over til it's over.

This is the underlying idea in Jason Odell Williams' *On The Market*, now presented at The Williamston Theatre through October 22.

Charlotte (Dani Cochrane) is a middle-aged widow, working in a Long Island Real Estate office with Diane (Yolanda David) and Frank (Patrick Loos). Charlotte's husband has been gone for two-and-a-half years, and she is stuck between wanting to move on and not wanting to seem or feel disloyal to the husband she loved.

And that is pretty much it. Unfortunately. Rather than assembling much of a real story arc, Williams sets up a "situation play." He invokes the series *Friends* as a cultural touchpoint in the 90-minute play, making reference to Ross and Rachel. It's apt, because the play has a sit-com quality, almost as if Charlotte is Rachel twenty years after the series ended and Ross has died.

Ms. Cochrane deftly handles the material, with her familiar and excellent comedic timing in fine balance with the sincere and earnest journey of grief she is navigating. Mr. Loos is always a pleasure to watch on stage for his craft of bringing humanity, as well as comedy, to his roles. Here, he has multiple hats to wear, from workmate Frank to a manic online date, an Australian narcissist offering sex to Charlotte, and a prospective home buyer.

Yolanda Davis is very solid as Diane and other ensemble parts, often playing off of Mr. Loos. Her brassy Long Island real estate agent is authentically played. Brian Sage also plays multiple roles, including dead husband James, an online date, delivery guy and others. Mr. Sage does very well switching gears and guises.

The set, by Kirk A Domer, is a flexible space dominated by a map on the backdrop of the set that extends to the floor of the performance space firmly locating the action and story in Long Island with well-known (to New Yorkers) places like Dix Hills, Ronkonkoma, Brentwood, etc., all called out. Mr. Williams writes from New York City, so he knows that Long Island is an odd place where scandals, weird behavior and stories hit the news almost every week. None of the Long Island weirdness, though, is on display save a reference to a mailman who dumped his mail and packages in a warehouse rather than delivering them (a Seinfeldian plot check.).

Eric Van Tassell is lighting designer; Karen Kangas-Preston is costume designer; Brian Cole on sound; Michelle Raymond is props designer and set dresser.

Grief is no joke, but to make it work on stage without sending patrons to the door before the play is over the characters need natural feeling humor and “On The Market” does that. But the story is paper thin, and feels more like a *Friends* special, perhaps one produced by The Hallmark Channel, rather than exploring the theme with meaningful effort. Mr. Williams gives his central character, Charlotte, the same name as his real-life wife, and the unseen daughter the name of his real life daughter, Imogen. Perhaps there is something autobiographical in the story? If so, all the more reason there should be more meat on this bone.

Williams uses a gimmick that get tired before he has used it for the last time—juxtaposing Charlotte’s real-estate persona describing properties she is trying to move with descriptions of herself as a woman trying to sell herself on a dating app.

Tony Caselli directs *On The Market*, and it is as solidly put together as any he has handled before. It’s just that for the most part, the story limps through some overly sentimental and shallow “plot” turns. Perhaps if the story were set in a coffeeshop instead of a real estate office, it would go down better? Paging Joey, Chandler, Monica and Phoebe! You are wanted at Central Perk.

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