

Clever writing makes breakup fun to watch

By Linda Rosborough

Entertainment Reporter

Anyone who has ever gone through a breakup – and is there a soul who hasn't? – knows it is a sad, bitter and lonely place to be

It can also be incredibly funny, at least when it happens on stage the snappy dialogue is supplied by a pair of clever playwrights.

Anniversary, penned by Pulitzer Prize-winner Carol Shields and fellow Winnipeg Novelist David Williamson a decade ago, is a compact little gem of a play.

At just 90 minutes, this modern relationship study is just long enough to develop its five characters and make its points about love, friendship and commitment without wearing out its welcome.

The story focuses on Tom and Dianne, a recently separated suburban couple in their 30's who meet on – of all days – their 13th wedding anniversary to sort out their assets and divide up their CDs, kitchen gadgets and furniture.

Toss in Dianne's young new boyfriend and a couple of long-time, long-lost friends who just happen to drop in and prove to be delightfully obnoxious and things get a little complicated. Not to mention tense, comic and poignant.

With lines as sharply funny as a well-written television sit-com, the writing is the real star of the show, which runs until June 16 as the Gas Station Theatre and 13th anniversary celebration for the Osborne Village venue.

The all-local cast – Jason Broadfoot, Catherine Roberts, Dan Weber, Sharon Moore and Devin McCracken – is competent enough, but the breezy dialogue, quickly defined characters and ironic flair make *Anniversary* shine.

"Every CD is a memory, every coffee mug is a milestone," laments Broadfoot's Tom, as maudlin and whining as any partner in denial could be.

"Millstone, don't you mean?" is Roberts' icy retort as the freshly confident Dianne.

This little exchange illustrates perfectly the charm of this play – we laugh at snide repartee, all the while recognizing the difficulty that comes in deciding who should keep the fish poacher.

A relatively unknown piece (it previously played at a lunchtime theatre in 1986, in Thompson last year and in Gimli last month) *Anniversary* was first written by Shields and Williamson in the mid-1980s.

Shields has gone on to write numerous books and plays, including the Pulitzer-winning *The Stone Diaries*. Williamson, a dean at Red River Community College, also has several books and teleplays on his resume.

Recent fine tuning and updating is readily apparent, with contemporary pop culture references to the Internet, Nintendo and Rollerblades sprinkled throughout.

The suburban living room set is no-nonsense and performances aren't knockouts but with its contemporary focus and fast-paced blend of comedy and drama, *Anniversary* easily beats out any TV sitcom repeat competing for summer evening attention.