



Not just another day in Way Up Bay *By Robert Buranello*

The evening of Friday, June 3 marked the much-anticipated opening of Dina Morrone's play, *Moose on the Loose*, that runs at Theatre West to July 10, 2011. The slight delay to the curtain's rise due to typical Friday night traffic only intensified the packed theatre's anticipation for this performance. The cast's possible opening-night jitters were certainly intensified by the "extreme last-minute emergency" that caused Mary Garripoli to be replaced by

bour ('la polacca'), we discover that it is not the moose but the Tappinos and the other immigrants who are far more displaced.

Moose on the Loose opens with the classic Italian Canadian scene of the Tappino family in the kitchen cooking, talking, reading, and glued to the Weather Channel for updates on the inhospitable climate outside the family's front door. They are awaiting the return of Gina, the 'wayward' older daughter who

generations of Italian Canadians with corresponding levels of attachment to old-world ways, and broken English peppered with Calabrianisms and italieese. When Bruno's First Nations girlfriend 'Honabigi' (Jemma Bosch) arrives, we get the more complete spectrum of the cultural and linguistic potpourri of Way Up Bay. Revealingly, it is through the words of 'Darryl' and 'Honabigi' – the 'outsiders' in this Calabro-Canadian family – that the audience understands the intended meaning of displacement. It is to the cast's credit that these generational and cultural distinctions are portrayed so effectively. Although all the cast members are thoroughly convincing in their roles (Laura James as nonna 'Pina' is a pistol!), particular mention must be made of Connie Mellors' portrayal of Maria. Although she was never without a copy of the script in her hand for this performance, it is through her convincing portrayal that it magically disappears behind her character, becoming just another prop like the stereotypical wooden spoon or dish rag that mamma Tappino might constantly have with her.

Whether arguing over the neighbours, 'impronouncable' English names like Timothy, the telephone, Giuseppe ending up in jail ("eeenna jaila"), or the loose moose, Dina Morrone's play shines with wit, verve, and good-natured *double entendres* concerning beaver and bush that provides for a very satisfying comedy. As difficult as it may be to convey to an LA audience, this troupe manages to communicate distinctions between Italian Canadians and Italian Americans without going too over the top. Although the occasional "eh's" and "aboot's" do stand out, the detail of hockey references, Tim Hortons coffee cups, Molson Canadian, and the preoccupation with the weather are spot-on Canadian ... and Italian Canadian, to boot. Ever a perfectionist for realistic detail, Dina Morrone seems to be bearing the torch for this realistic portrayal when she has Gina's first appearance on stage be characterized by the removal of layers of clothing and boots, to immediately bend down and wipe up the imaginary snow from the spotless Italian Canadian kitchen floor. No Italian Canadian would ever forget that important repeated winter ritual, this reviewer included. If you're looking for Sopranos references, gumbas and guidos, fuhgeddaboutit! If, on the other hand, you are seeking a warm, heart-felt portrayal of the immigrant story with poignant implications that will make you laugh and cry in almost the same breath, you must spend the evening with the Tappino family and the loose moose where "it's not just another day in Way Up Bay," eh ...

Photo courtesy of Ed Krieger



A scene from the play Moose on the Loose. In the photo actors John Cygan and Tom Badal

Connie Mellors in the pivotal role of 'Maria' a mere hour and a half before the scheduled opening-night performance. In spite of this, as Producer Stephen Rivkin announced to the packed and enthusiastic crowd, the show must go on. It certainly did, and with marvelous results.

This comedy about an Italian family and a Canadian moose was written by Dina Morrone (also playing 'Gina') who was inspired by true events in her native city of Thunder Bay, Ontario, situated on the northwest edge of Lake Superior. That most unlikely place for Calabrian immigrants served Dina very well for inspiration of this very fun, family-oriented comedy about displaced people. Hence, Way Up Bay – that "frozen tundra" – appears as an intensely cold and potentially inhospitable place for Calabrian immigrants whose warm southern Mediterranean climate is replaced by the relentless cold, snow and ice of the Great White North where English, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Finnish, and aboriginal languages and cultures coexist. In order to convey that sense of disorientation, it is the Moose, interpreted by Tom Badal (with perhaps the most convincing Canadian accent among the cast) who refers to these odd and bemused people way up north with references to Ojibway myth and carries himself with the slow dignity of that most majestic and imposing creature of the north. Despite being trapped in the yard of the Tappino family's Polish neigh-

bour left home years ago to pursue a career in the 'mysterious' field of 'mahrketeeeng' and jets around the world with frequent stays in Rome and infrequent arrivals home. With nonno 'Rodolfo' (Jack Kuther) and nonna 'Pina' (Laura James) present, 'Giuseppe' and 'Maria' (John Cygan and Connie Mellors, respectively) bicker over grappa, snow, and whether or not to go out and shoot the trapped moose, sons 'Joseph' (Nick McDow) and 'Bruno' (Johnny Ferretti) provide insights to the later generation of Tappino's who are more interested in their studies (Joseph is studying to become a nurse – to the puzzlement of the family that sees this as a female career pursuit) or the weather as Bruno (aka "Meester Stuckatoathecoucha") only gets up to stealthily lower the thermostat inside the home. With the arrival of Gina's younger sister 'Carmela' (Corinne Shor), Anglo-Canadian husband 'Darryl' (Michael Lorre), and their young son 'Timothy' (Grant Venable), the family dynamic takes on fuller dimensions with references to sibling rivalries and inter-linguistic miscommunications. When 'Gina' arrives after a 30-hr series of flights, missed connections, and lost luggage, the story develops further intrigue because she is harbouring an important secret that may upset the established family dynamic but, ultimately, brings the whole family together. With grandparents, parents, children and grand children on stage, we get the full picture of four