

SPOTLIGHT: JANET AMOS, THE GLADSTONE VARIATIONS



JON KAPLAN NOW MAGAZINE THURSDAY JULY 17, 2008

For the second summer in a row, Janet Amos has a reservation at the Gladstone Hotel.

Audiences will want to check in, too, for a remount of Convergence Theatre's *The Gladstone Variations*, a series of four interrelated plays that show off the talents of a large acting company of vets like Amos as well as young talents like Marc Bendavid and Athena Lamarre.

A hit at last year's Fringe, the Variations are contemporary tales rich with the local history both of the Parkdale area and the renovated Gladstone.

You can catch a pair of the four plays each night, either those by Rick Roberts and Mike McPhaden or Brendan Gall and Julie Tepperman.

The extra excitement of the production, spearheaded by Tepperman and director Aaron Willis, is that viewers travel with characters through hotel rooms and corridors, sometimes intersecting with groups from the other two shows. Each variation stands on its own, but there's added richness in seeing all four plays.

"The young writers were given the freedom to write what they want," recalls Amos, one of the original 70s Theatre Passe Muraille artists who collaborated with collective theatre pioneer Paul Thompson. "Surprisingly, they each created older characters appropriate to the theme of the hotel's past."

Amos plays Rhonda, local resident and regular at the Gladstone's karaoke night. When we meet her, she's just been barred from taking part in the evening of song.

"A bit psychic to begin with, Rhonda becomes more so when she's not allowed into the hotel; she feels displaced by the area's new residents and the hotel's new management. Rhonda starts seeing characters from the other stories, people those in her own world aren't aware of."

One of the great things about *The Gladstone Variations* is the blend of actors from different generations: established performers like Amos, Robert Naismith, Richard Greenblatt and new cast member Richard McMillan work with those more recently on the scene, such as James Cade, Christopher Stanton and Nadine Villasin.

As a result, the production becomes a great training vehicle, a chance for handing on the artistic torch, as well as an exciting piece of theatre.

"The show has the feel of some of the pieces I did in the early 70s," adds Amos, who's run the Blyth Festival and Theatre New Brunswick. "Julie and Aaron are like Paul Thompson or the Tarragon's first artistic director, Bill Glassco. Like those guys, they have amazing spirit and energy and a love of theatre."