

Theater Review: Love triangle with a dog?

By Jim Lowe

BURLINGTON — Greg, beginning a serious mid-life crisis, brings home Sylvia, a frisky blond he picked up in the park. And he's worried what his wife will think. As well he should.

You see, Sylvia is a dog.

Vermont Stage Co. opened a hilarious and even touching production of "Sylvia," the 1995 A.R. Gurney comedy, last week at the Flynn Center's FlynnSpace. Running through May 9, it is directed by Mark Nash in his last production as artistic director of the Burlington professional company.

Sylvia is a dog but, as far as Greg's wife Kate is concerned, she may as well be another woman. Greg seems more interested in Sylvia than in Kate or his job. In fact, he begins taking time off work to spend more time with Sylvia.

Greg treats Sylvia more as a mistress than a dog and is fascinated by everything about her. He even convinces a restaurant to serve Sylvia when they come for lunch.

Needless to say, Kate, who has just begun a new teaching career, is hurt — and furious — at the idea of losing her husband to a dog. Finally, Kate delivers an ultimatum: It's either Sylvia or her.

What ensues is the unexpected, touching and funny.

Vermont Stage's excellent production benefits from a fine cast. Sylvia, in particular, played by Nash's wife Kathryn Blume, is simply priceless. Blume's witty and sardonic performance, physically as well as verbally, kept Thursday's sold-out audience in stitches.

Stephen Bradbury delivered Greg's passion and obliviousness to anything but Sylvia enthusiastically and convincingly. Melissa Lourie handled the more difficult role of Kate, making her the perfect mix of shrew and frustrated loving wife.

Despite there being a "dog" on stage, John D. Alexander nearly stole the show — in drag — as Kate's haughty Vassar classmate. Alexander proved side-splittingly funny, and he was nearly as entertaining as the dog-loving weirdo Tom and the genderless therapist Leslie.

The production was particularly well choreographed for the theater-in-the-round configuration. Catherine Vigne deserves kudos for Sylvia's particularly expressive costumes and Alexander's particularly entertaining ones.

Vermont Stage's "Sylvia" proved most entertaining.