

A Bench In The Sun by Ron Clark, directed by Venessa Park
Hutt Repertory Theatre, 108 Oxford Terrace, Epuni till November 22

Reviewed by Ewen Coleman Thursday 13 November

Every once in a while a little known play appears on stage around town that takes everyone by surprise as being a real gem – Ron Clark's *A Bench in the Sun* currently playing at Hutt Repertory Theatre being such an example. While it's not the greatest play ever written - there's no real plot to speak of and not a lot happens - it does have three wonderfully written characters - elderly Americans in a rest home - with some marvellously interactive dialogue between them, especially the men.

In the Valley View Gardens retirement home two old men sit each morning on a bench in the garden philosophising and bickering with each other. They have been friends all their lives - except for a gap of 42 years.

Burt is a crotchety old curmudgeon, a cynic and pessimist who remains in his pyjamas all day so he won't have to keep undressing when he takes his frequent naps. Harold on the other hand is almost Burt's opposite; impeccably dressed, he is the eternal optimist despite his three failed marriages, five failed businesses, and children who won't speak to him. Then along comes Adrienne, a retired actress, whose beauty and effervescent personality stimulates romantic interest in the two men.

Although the play could be seen as perpetuating the stereotypical myth that all old folks do all day is sit about moaning, it nevertheless has some very funny lines mixed with poignant heartfelt moments.

In Hutt Repertory Theatre's production director Vanessa Park has the perfect cast – the two men sparking off each other with great alacrity, showing that while outwardly they can't bear to be in each other's company, secretly they'd be lost if one or the other didn't turn up one morning.

Geoff Scrase plays the grumpy grouch Burt to perfection, tossing off his cynical one-liners with acidic venom while Michael McBryde plays Harold with just the right amount of aplomb, immune to Burt's endless barbs. Barbara Williams is the flirt between the two, flighty and fluffy with a mischievous air of mystery about her persona.

While the languidity of the characters at times affects the pace of the production - there needs to be more moments of heightened tension and more made of some of the many caustic quips to give the over all production more light and shade, more vocal colour, it is still a great production of a funny and entertaining play that is well worth seeing.