

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

THE TRUTH

*Reviewed by June
Collins, 1 Aug 2026*



Author: Florian Zeller

Director: George Werther

Theatre Company: Mordialloc Theatre Co. Inc.

REVIEW

For a time, *The Truth* – written by Florence Zellar and translated by Christopher Hampton – seems like a very uninspired farce – where in trying to conceal an affair, ridiculous lies will be sworn to and illogical calamities will occur, before all of it comes crashing down like a house of cards.

Because that's what we get for the first few scenes. For six months, Michel (Greg Barison) has been cheating on his wife, Laurence (Carissa McPherson), with his best friend Paul's (Hamish Walker) wife, Alice (Venetia Macken). But Laurence is beginning to suspect Michel is up to no good and Michel becomes desperate to keep the lies going and not have to confess the truth.

But the truth is a funny thing and as the story unfolds, *The Truth* becomes an interesting play and one worthy of staging. The neat trick Zellar pulls is having Michel begin the play panicking to preserve both his public and secret lives only to discover that those closest to him have had secret lives built around Michel for years.

The play is set in France. We deduce this from all of the actors speaking in a French accent. Or rather, attempting to. One of the elements a Director considers when approaching a play is whether the setting of the play or circumstances of the characters require any of the actors to use an accent.

Accents are a wonderful tool that can enrich a character and inform a performance – when done accurately. If not, however, and a Director still insists upon it, especially when not necessary, then you struggle to see what's achieved other than a Director exposing an actor's limitations as well as creating a needless sonic abrasion for the audience.

Of the four cast members, only one was able to deliver their lines consistently and accurately in a French accent while also projecting to the back of the room. Keeping the French setting, but changing Michel to Michael and Laurence to Laura, and letting the actors use their natural voices would have freed them up vocally and helped give the play a little more life.

Speaking of projection, voices on stage varied in reach, with too many head cranes needed from your seat in order to catch a line. Sometimes this restrained quality was due to accents, but mostly blocking with actors frequently standing perpendicular to the stage when talking, sending a healthy portion of their voice into the wings instead of out to us.

Indeed, whether at Michel's home, the gym with Paul, Alice's office, or Paul's home, the play as a whole was blocked very flat in a lateral sense. Entertaining as *The Truth* was,

you got the feeling as it progressed that much of the potential comedy was left on the rehearsal room floor.

In the preamble of the script, Hampton suggests, "Simple sets. The capacity to move very swiftly from one to another." Mary Werther's set design approaches this with a mostly static three-sided set, with a signifying set item brought on to place us where we need to be in each scene (for example a bed slid on for the hotel, a chair for Michel's house, a small bench for the gym, or a more office-y white desk for Alice's surgery). The shape and finish of the set was cleanly executed, which considering Martin Gibbs was in charge of its realisation comes as no surprise.

Paul was played nicely by Hamish Walker, especially during the penultimate scene. Resplendent in his best French existentialist turtleneck sweater, Paul is relaxed and standing in delicious contrast to Michel's crumbling demeanour. Hamish conveys Paul's state of Zen admirably, with the right amount and kindness and pity as he regards Michel, demonstrating the peace Michel could find if he just admitted the truth.

Smaller roles don't often equal smaller demands on an actor, and the character of Laurence, Michel's wife, is no exception. When we first meet her, she's suspicious, worn and jaded, but also playful in a way. When we see her next and last, there's no more subterfuge. We expect relief, but Laurence is more subdued, wrestling with unexpected heartbreak as well as a delusional spouse. Carissa McPherson conveyed Laurence's emotions very well, especially her character's darkness in the play's final moments.

Venetia Macken did great work as Alice. Alice is mildly horny, majorly guilty, and Venetia navigated her character's journey in splendid fashion, wielding a strong, dulcet French accent that never ventured into exaggerated 'Allo 'Allo territory. Moments where Alice opened up to Michel about how bad she was feeling, only for Michel to completely disregard her, thinking only of his bite ("beet"), were given genuine weight by Venetia in what was a terrific performance.

Greg Barison deserves a medal for bravery for looking at the role of Michel – a character that's in every scene of the play, doing the bulk of the heavy lifting line-wise – and thinking, "I'm in!" Michel does a lot of thinking fast on his feet that eventually turns into hilarious and oblivious outrage, which Greg delivered excellently.

There were, unfortunately, too many instances of his body from the waist down not matching the tone and energy of the words being spoken. For example, when Michel confronts Alice in her surgery, the actors would be close together before Greg would move across the stage to open up the blocking, but each time he did so it was only with a too-casual amble that defused the tension. To be fair though, all four cast members had a habit of ambling, so this becomes more a note on direction.

It was particularly a shame when during one of the blackouts between scenes, Greg hurries off stage with a pace and intention that even through the penumbra was

electric, making you wish he had been allowed to bring more of that electricity to the role.

Fortunately, talent is impossible to deny, and each cast member brought enough spark to ensure the audience enjoyed themselves, which based our reactions throughout the show they absolutely did. Bravo.