FRONT ROW CENTER

By Michael Warren

The Kitchen Witches
By Caroline Smith
Directed by Roger Tredway

If you like farce and slapstick, you'll enjoy this play by Canadian playwright Caroline Smith. *The Kitchen Witches*
is set in a small town cable TV station – it's a hokey cooking show and we are the studio audience. So the fourth wall is effectively removed and we, as the audience, become part of the play. It's a clever ruse which encourages all of us not to sit on our hands, and become lively and applaud on cue.

A talented cast, ably directed by Roger Tredway, have a lot of fun and deliver the one-line zingers with tremendous pace. Anne Drake plays “Dolly Biddle” with flair and a phony Ukrainian accent. She opens the play with a long monologue as Babcha, the wisecracking hostess of *Coo king With Babcha*
, and sets the wacky tone for what proves to be a very funny show. It’s so hilariously bad, it’s good. Anne is a newcomer to the LLT stage and I look forward to seeing her in more comic and curious parts in the future.

Diana Rowland gives a cool and accomplished performance as “Isobel Lomax” who is a Martha-Stewart type gourmet cook, and Dolly’s arch-rival and former high school friend/enemy. She is the perfect foil to the earthy Babcha as the two exchange insults on camera. Meanwhile, Russell Mack is excellent as “Stephen Biddle” who is both Dolly’s son and the producer of what is supposed to be a cooking show. He tries valiantly, but without much success, to keep the two apart and the food in the pan.

And I should also mention an entertaining cameo performance by Graham Miller (“Rob” the camera guy) who is superbly glum throughout. Finally, a “guest celebrity” from the audience is invited to become a victim during a dessert contest in the second Act. Congratulations (and a free prostate exam) to all who took part.

During the second act, the fourth wall reappears. We actually have a sentimental scene between Isobel and Stephen, and it turns out that Isobel is Stephen’s birth mother. This is difficult for the actors to manage in the middle of a farce, and I give Diana Rowland and Russell Mack great credit for pulling it off. It could be an awkward and embarrassing scene – however, they handle it with considerable skill. Then it’s back to the one-liners and slapstick food jokes. There are also some clever costume changes, including a “Gone with the Wind” scene with Dolly as Scarlett in a frilly green dress, and Isobel as Prissy (I don’ know nothin’ ‘bout birthin’ babies) in an antiquated maid outfit. It’s a silly play, and at times the humor is of the Benny Hill genre – I found it hard to believe that it won a Samuel French play-writing award. However, there are lots of belly laughs, and everyone is having such a good time that we hardly notice the strange transitions from comic to serious.

Roger Tredway and his team did a great job in bringing this slick production to the stage. The timing was smooth and the acting was first class. Congratulations to Stage Manager Karen Lee (an LLT first-timer as Stage Manager) and Gerri Tredway as Production Assistant. I also congratulate Properties Manager Joan Lowy and her crew. There are literally hundreds of props and food items, and it must have been extremely difficult to organize backstage. The set design was effective – we really felt we were in a TV studio – and the set construction crew made it all

seem real, and also built a truly impressive shoulder-held TV camera. Well done to all concerned.

Next up is “No Clue?” (directed by Roseann Wilshire) which opens on November 5th. It’s a parody of the board game
Clue
, and of Agatha Christie murder mysteries, so the stage will be littered with dead bodies and the actors will be clueless! See you next month.