

# Opinion | ‘The Time Capsule’ will make you laugh and cheer for Hamilton

Underneath it has lots to say about getting along, celebrating differences and knowing what’s important in life even when the comedy makes such matters take a back seat.

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Richard Alan Campbell and Mary Long in a scene from “The Time Capsule.”  
Photo: Dahlia Katz

**By Gary Smith, Special to the Spectator**

“The Time Capsule” is a feel-good cartoon comedy that wants to be a lot more.

It’s set in Hamilton, which caused a large preview audience to laugh, roar and cheer every time Grandad’s Donuts was mentioned. Big-time acknowledgment too greets the mention of Winners, that popular discount clothing store that received audience rah-rahs that outstripped mention of classy Milli’s, Hamilton’s high-end ladies boutique.

Such shout-outs certainly gave a local feel to playwright Matt Murray’s hometown Hamilton play that opened Theatre Aquarius’ 2025-2026 season.

“The Time Capsule” is good entertainment. You’ll want to laugh out loud as its five characters, all with niggling issues, try to unravel troubled lives. A diverse group trapped in a chilly church hall, they lower protective shields to share some secrets. You might even say they bond.

And that’s where the serious side of Murray’s play comes in.

But wait a minute, is it really likely that a marriage broken down by years of poor communication could be set on a hopeful road in a few minutes of therapy? Of course not. But that’s the joy of Murray’s play. He makes us want to believe there are happy endings here beyond all the Hamilton cheerleading that is obviously going on.

He wants us to forget the multiple problems of a disturbing downtown, a largely unused theatre that hasn’t brought a big show in years, and LRT woes that threaten to go on for more years than some of us have left. But come on, this is essentially a comedy designed to make us yelp with laughter.

All the underscoring drama about bringing people together, making connections, loving our city for its grit and grime are nice notions, but they’re pretty much just a framework for the essential comedy. And every time Murray’s play threatens to catch dramatic fire, it’s bombarded with funny lines that deflate serious intentions.

Erin Fraser, a Hamilton high school history teacher, has called for volunteers to voice their ideas and concerns about the beloved time capsule she plans to bury in Centennial Park. A bit of a bully, she obviously expects them to do more than slurp down the coffee and scarf the doughnuts (Grandad’s, of course) on the big table at the side of the room.

That room happens to be a cold church hall, where the boiler isn’t working, and a wily custodian pops in and out like some sort of seer with a mop. As you might expect, not many show up to voice their time capsule concerns. But lordy, lordy they are a contentious and troublesome little group.

Over the course of the evening, surprising truths get told and we soon discover things are not always what they seem. Unfortunately, things deflate a little when the play tries too hard to be Hamilton-centric. Dropping names like Grandad’s Donuts, Milli’s and Carmen’s seems like gratuitous filler, perhaps even patronizing jingoism.

Things are best in the stronger second act when Murray allows his play to breathe without the hometown litany. Thankfully, director Mary Francis Moore and a well-chosen cast pick up the slack and crank up the pace, so every time we’re threatened with one more cliché, we’re distracted by something less contrived.

Speaking of contrivances, would uptight teacher Erin really create a time capsule like the one here? That naïve she surely isn’t. And do we really need to be reminded that Hamilton old-timers Martin Short and Eugene Levy were once pranksters and cut-ups at McMaster University? There are more important revelations here.

Deborah Drakeford plays Erin Fraser with just the right touch of teacherly control. She might lower the volume a little though, so we can see sooner the vulnerable woman that’s sporting that trendy hairstyle and so-called Milli blouse.

Richard Alan Campbell is her hubby Rick, forced along for this church hall evening of surprises. He blends just the right touch of henpecked husband with the guy who would like to love his wife again, but needs help to know how.

Popping in and out of Robin Fisher’s superb and instantly recognizable church hall setting, with its tiny hardwood stage and uncomfortable folding chairs, shuffles that crusty custodian Louise. She all but steals the play in the hands of the redoubtable Mary Long, who affects a perfect gait and knowing shrug.

Then there’s Richard Young’s Marcus, moved to Hamilton from Montreal and looking for the right guy to help him build a forever nest.

Finally, add Jess, played by snappy Stephanie Sy. She bartends at a Barton Street watering hole and surprisingly knows all about Florence Lawrence, a long-forgotten Hamilton movie star.

Who knows why she knows this, or why she cares about her vanished career.

Now, before you think “The Time Capsule” is a bust, trying to get by spouting local references, let me tell you it’s not. Underneath it has lots to say about getting along, celebrating differences and knowing what’s important in life even when the comedy makes such matters take a back seat.

The cast here ride the bumpy moments like the pros they are and by the time the play’s exotic capsule is carted off, we care more about the people of today than its 100-year future.

Now, about that capsule. When it’s ultimately revealed, it says something more about the times we live in than anything dropped into its cavity. You’ll know what I mean when you see it.