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Entertainment Extra

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Love tested in dark new drama

Blind Eye is a profound journey using comedy to venture into the dark depths of consciousness.

Photo / Lindsey Bishop.

REVIEW

Keith Russell

Vera, who has been blind since birth, has relied on her partner, Wally, to guide her through life's tribulations, including words to guide her on imaginary world travels.

Wally has provided the cocoon of love and security that until now has never been challenged, but an incident changes all this, bringing two strangers into their world, resulting in outside scrutiny into their lifelong bond.

Waipukurau Little Theatre brings this very human story onto the stage, written by prolific Kiwi playwright April Phillips. Possibly better known for her award-winning comedy productions, this contemporary drama, *Blind Eye*, is a very profound journey using comedy to venture into the dark depths of societal consciousness.

Director Lindsey Bishop has chosen a strong cast of four to follow the writer's premise by presenting the dynamics in such a way that delivers a powerful twist at the end, answering the age-old question: Is there a cost to true love?

I am sure Kate D'Ath, as the unsighted Vera, will long remember this role as her defining moment on the boards. Playing a character who is unsighted as well as

Blind Eye sees Waipukurau Little Theatre probe control, dementia and hocking twist



Waipukurau Little Theatre

- What: *Blind Eye*
- Where: Waipukurau Little Theatre, Ruataniwha St, Waipukurau.
- When: 19 to 28 March. Tickets at Eventfinda, Waipawa Library or The Hub Waipukurau.

displaying the early stages of dementia would present challenges for any actor, but D'Ath gives a very sensitive

and powerful performance. Playing the part of Wally was Rob Mackintosh, with a skilled performance, powerful when required, but also capable of moments of tenderness. I thought the amount of control he had over Vera was the problem, but little did I know what was waiting near the end. D'Ath and Mackintosh both have very demanding roles involving lengthy scenes that will leave you emotionally raw, but this just serves as a method of drawing you into their world.

Helen Griffin as the district

nurse, and Andrew Laird, as the policeman, excel at drawing you into their own relationship, which becomes a paradox to dare you to judge the elderly couple's situation. Both were skilled at presenting how the real world finally begins to question the uncomfortable truth. Their facial expressions were just as shocked as the audience's when we realised what surprises the garden held.

All actors were crisp with their dialogue delivery and achieved clear diction and projection out into the theatre.

The set depicting a cosy kitchen was basic, which did little to detract from the unfolding story. Forget the warning your mother might have given you; this is a quality piece of local theatre, and to witness it was a privilege.

Long after you leave the theatre, as you ponder and discuss the meaning of the playwright's right vs wrong ending, it would be well to remember the young policeman's observation of "forget black and white, it's the grey that keeps you up at night".

Review: Leanne Goodger

Blind eye, Waipukurau Little Theatre's latest production is a tender and thought - provoking work by New Zealand playwright April Phillips. Under Lindsey Bishop's sensitive direction, the play becomes a moving portrait of devotion through the lives of aging couple Vera and Wally. Vera is blind and struggling with the early signs of dementia. Wally has had to give up work to care for her but does so with steadfast love and patience.

Kate D'Ath is outstanding as Vera capturing every shade of her character's vulnerability and spirit. She moves seamlessly from bubbly humour to fearful confusion, to moments of aching lucidity. The Italian flashback scenes are particularly evocative—helped by clever music and lighting, I could almost smell ciabatta bread and freshly lit cigarettes.

Rob Mackintosh as Wally, brings warmth and depth to his character. His quiet anguish as he faces Vera's decline and the pressures around them is deeply affecting; his performance was incredibly moving and the final scenes left many in the audience visibly moved.

Andrew Laird makes a convincing Sergeant Warburton blending the right amount of officious with basic nice guy. And he simply looks the part.

District nurse Alice is played by Helen Griffin with the efficiency expected of her profession – and a touch of bossiness. Her moments of silence are as powerful as her spoken lines, revealing her admiration for the loving bond shared by Vera and Wally.

Blind Eye is an evening of heartfelt theatre that lingers well after the lights fade. That's a job well done.

Congratulations cast and crew – you really delivered.



Meet the *Blind Eye* family!. Left to right: Rob Macintosh, Kate D'Ath, Helen Griffin, Andrew Laird and Director, Lindsey Bishop. Photo by Lupin Berry.

REVIEW: Jules Hamilton

The last time an April Phillips play was staged at Waipukurau Little Theatre, it was a hilarious comedy called *Stiff* that filled the aisles with laughter and bawdy shenanigans.

This time around in the touching *Blind Eye*, Phillips really showcases her dramatic prowess as she invites us into the complex world of an aging couple, Vera and Wally Matthews, beset by tragedy but ultimately filled with love.

The set design by director Lindsey Bishop is ingenious and allows clever use of the space. There are sculptural elements beyond the French doors, allowing the actors to use the whole space when exploring their character's emotional journeys.

The lighting design by Wal Slavin and Lindsey Bishop is a marvel with whole background scenes coming to life as the audience is transported to places like Venice or the mystical Northern Lights.

In close conversation with these lighting set-ups is the beautiful soundscape designed by Luke Madsen and Lindsey Bishop and complemented by heartfelt live performance songs by Rob Mackintosh and Kate D'Ath

The cast is small, only four actors bring this story to life, but they all hold their space admirably.

Andrew Laird convincingly plays Pat the no-nonsense cop, stoic and even tempered, led by a moral compass of safety and protection.

Helen Griffin plays district nurse Alice with a nuanced performance as she shoulders the story's tether points, struggling with her own life choices and discovering that not everything in life is as it appears to be.

Kate D'Ath portrays Vera with softly spoken tenderness. She switches beautifully between states of early onset dementia, fond reminiscence, and humour in a delightful performance.

Rob Mackintosh is compelling as Vera's partner Wally, a tough ex-bricklayer who plays his character with deep affection as dementia begins to rob Vera of her very essence. When I viewed the final dress rehearsal of this production last night with the CHB College drama students; you could have heard a pin drop in the final scenes as Wally lays his heart out for all to see.

Waipukurau Little Theatre's latest show brings to mind an old saying "The colour of truth is grey," meaning that the truth of our lives is complex and often found in the shades between black and white absolutes. *Blind Eye* lays before the audience an existential dilemma. The story and all of its themes will have you talking about it long after the curtain falls.

Do go along and see this moving piece of theatre. We all live in a world that is desperately in need of connection and compassion and being able to spend an hour or so sharing the energy that exists between audience and performers is time well spent.

CENTRAL FM REVIEW

It is always a pleasure to review shows, the sneak peek giving my thoughts before it is opened to the public, thank you for allowing me to do this - definitely a highlight on my calendar!

Blind Eye Review

A play about the lives of an elderly couple, Wally & Vera who are both very much in love, Vera is blind & showing signs of dementia. Wally is dedicated to keeping Vera happy & their lives from the public eye.

Alice a district nurse soon works out something is amiss & Sergeant Patrick Warburton is faced with quite the dilemma in more ways than one.

Very thought-provoking you see not only a spin on a modern relationship but one that has lasted decades (Who is right & who is wrong)?

Director: Lindsey Bishop had every reason to have a tear in his eye after the show.

You have masterfully put together a brilliant piece of theatre!

The casting of the four characters was well thought out & the chemistry between them was evident.

Set design was well laid out - the flips of the wall revealing a new scene was very clever.

Lighting was equally sharp - the dark eerie scenes sent tingles up my spine!

Vera (played by Kate D'Ath) had the task of becoming someone who is not only blind but has early signs of dementia - not an easy role but was executed perfectly.

Wally (played by Rob Mackintosh) - the chemistry between yourself & Vera made it all so real, and we as viewers felt every emotion so convincing that we were left questioning right & wrong, or, do we turn a Blind Eye. Pat (played by Andrew Laird) - the role fitted you like a glove.

Move over Sergeant Baker, Officer Warburton is ready for service!

The lovely Alice, played by Helen Griffin, slotted nicely into character - such a kind & caring soul but her private life is questionable.

“Emotional, Confronting & Unexpected”

Moments of comedy - especially in the first half - lighten up a very deep story.

The key is, when you have watched Blind Eye, don't let the cat out of the bag as the ending is a jaw dropper.

Don't miss your chance to see Blind Eye live on stage with Waipukurau Little Theatre. Performances run from Thursday 19 March to Saturday 28 March 2026, including a Sunday matinee on 22 March at 2.30pm. Evening shows begin at 7.30pm.

Up next at Waipukurau Little Theatre

JULY 2026

On the night before Halloween, 1938, a seemingly ordinary radio program is interrupted by urgent news bulletins: strange explosions have been observed on the surface of Mars. As the broadcast continues, reports grow more alarming—an alien cylinder has landed in rural New Jersey. What begins as curiosity quickly turns to terror when towering machines emerge, unleashing devastating heat rays and poisonous black smoke.

Told in the style of a live radio news report, the story blurs the line between fiction and reality, capturing the chaos, confusion, and fear of a world under sudden attack. This stage adaptation recreates the tension and immediacy of Orson Welles' infamous broadcast—an event so convincing it left many listeners believing Earth was truly under siege.

