Joking Apart by English playwright Alan Ayckbourn is one of those plays that forces us to look at a characteristic of human nature that many of us would not be comfortable to admit to.

At its heart the play is about a golden couple who are not only successful and happy but immensely generous to others. Their friends, business colleagues and neighbours are both drawn to them and repelled at the same time.

Performed by third year acting students from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), the play spans a time period of twelve years. Time is marked by the aging of characters as girths thicken and hair greys and through Brian’s series of new girlfriends that mark one unsuccessful relationship after another.

Of course through all of this the happy couple Richard and Anthea are seemingly unaffected remaining as good-looking as ever, finding financial security and raising well adjusted children.

What makes this play so good is the subject matter, although uncomfortable it is so true. I would hasten to add that there are not many of us who could honestly say they have not experienced jealousy over someone else’s good fortune or been on the receiving end of someone else’s envy.

Hannah Pepper gave a stand out performance as Anthea, every bit believable as the fun loving helpful wife and mother who takes everything in her stride. James Monarski was also very good as her husband Richard, though I would have liked to see him dote on his wife a little more than he did.

My favourite actress of the night was Claire Lovering who played four different roles throughout the play and if I hadn’t read this in the program I wonder how long it would have taken me to pick this up. Surely the sign of a very talented actress - each of her characters were completely different and her whole demeanour and facial expressions changed with each role. Hats off to costume designer Reece Scott who chose outfits that even made her physical shape change.

When Lovering appeared on stage as Anthea’s daughter the physical similarity between the two ladies was uncanny. In fact the director Andrew Lewis did a marvellous job with all his casting choices.

The first half of the performance did seem to suffer from opening night nerves but by second half the actors seemed relaxed and all their performances lifted a notch. The pace was very good, a show of this nature needs to keep moving along quite fast and it did.

Also worthy of mention was the set design which featured a lovely green garden with a decked seating area and half a tennis court. I enjoyed the way the actors would play a game of tennis with their opponents off stage in the wing yet my imagination filled in the gaps.

All in all, a good performance by third year WAAPA acting students who are worthy of our support.

WAAPA presents
JOKING APART
by Alan Ayckbourn

Venue: The Geoff Gibbs Theatre, WAAPA, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley
Dates/Times: Fri 11, Sat 12, Mon 14, Tues 15, Wed 16, Thur 17 June at 7.30pm
Matinee: Saturday 12 June at 2pm
Tickets: $30 full/$25 concession
Bookings: WAAPA Box Office on 9370 6636