

A Night at the Theatre

A series of Five Comic One Act Plays by David Ives. STARC Productions. Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. 17-27 July, 2019.



I always think it is a really good thing when you have been to the theatre that when you leave you need to discuss it and you keep discussing what you have seen all the way home and then you think about it when you are lying in bed.

A Night at the Theatre is a series of comic one act plays by David Ives, the leading American writer of Absurdist theatre. Theatre of the Absurd usually does not get much of an airing, so it is both interesting and worthwhile that STARC Productions presents these short and technically difficult plays.

Ives' analysis and understanding of the ways in which language is used and structured is at the heart of these works. In itself, language can be used to both increase and also hide meaning. It can alienate and welcome. Ives uses these ideas within his plays to explore how the relationships between two characters are built on language.

Stefanie Rossi, Marc Clement and *Tony Knight have a wealth of talent and experience between them, so these plays are in excellent hands, which is essential when tackling this genre because while it is deliberately absurd, it also has to make sense and work theatrically. This is harder to do with one-act plays because there is little or no time to build rapport between the audience and the characters with plays that do not follow a traditional narrative line. Immaculate timing is essential, as is the ability of the characters to be able to change direction, character and purpose believably and in a split second.



The plays are presented simply, with a few chairs, the occasional prop, a table and a change of costumes. The light and sound by Stephen Dean works well. I particularly liked the lighting for the third play, *English Made Simple*.

I loved three of the plays in particular, *Sure Thing*, *English Made Simple* and *The Universal Language*. I didn't like *Variations on The Death of Trotsky* and wasn't as keen on *Long Ago and Far Away*, although my guest loved this one. I did love the moment in *Long Ago and Far Away* when Rossi in character was listening to the music.

She was really listening and it was absorbing to watch.

Rossi in particular was a stand out for me. Her skill in listening and responding to Clement was fantastic. It meant that her performance was always in the moment. Clement managed best in the final play, *The Universal Language*, which consisted of an amalgam of words from many languages that were usually out of context but provided the consistent surprise of both comedy and understanding.

It is too difficult to explain what each of the plays is about and it would take away the delight and laughter to do so. You need to see them to appreciate them properly and at only 80 minutes long, it is the perfect length for an evening out.

Go and have *A Night at the Theatre*; laugh, enjoy, and spend some time on your way home discussing what it was all about.

Sally Putnam – *Stage Whispers*

*Tony Knight reviews for *Stage Whispers*