

Fefu and Her Friends Presented by **Joh Hartog Productions** Reviewed by **Georgina Smerd Glam Adelaide**

Set in 1935 South Australia, **Fefu and Her Friends** explores the lives of a group of educated women trapped in a male dominated society through an unusual and unique theatre experience.



As the lights rise the audience is introduced to the outrageous Fefu in her lounge room unusually describing her relationship with her husband in that he only married her as a constant reminder of how loathsome women are. As her friend Cindy reacts in shock, Fefu appears to revel in this reaction and continues this behaviour by flippantly shooting a gun out the window at her husband who gamely falls down pretending to be dead. This sets the scene for what will definitely be a day for the audience to witness that is certainly out of the ordinary. As more friends arrive it becomes clear that the reason for the women gathering is in preparation of a performance for an educational fundraising event, but that's not all that this turbulent day will bring...

The play was originally written to have different sections staged in various rooms at the same time and Director Joh Hartog has stayed true to this unique feature. After being introduced to the group of women in the first act, the second act provides four different scenes that give a deeper glimpse into the women's lives and friendships with the audiences voyeuristically moving through the physical rooms of the Bakehouse Theatre to witness them. There are debates about the time-frames of relationships and romantic breakdowns in the kitchen, emotionally vulnerable discussions out on the lawn, hallucinogenic nightmares in the spare bedroom and gossiping and discussions of bizarre dreams in the study – all engrossing the audience in the light these vignettes shed on the women.

Fefu and Her Friends is a prime example of famed Cuban/American playwright Maria Irene Fornés' often experimental plays that she personally wrote and directed. Her absurdist quality comes through in the use of multiple scenes set at the same time but in different rooms – a technique not often used in theatre.



The entire cast play their roles well though there are definite standout performances given, with Krystal Brock as the formidable Fefu leading the way. Brock captures Fefu's seemingly nonchalant attitude about life and her love for pushing the buttons of those around her, but also exposes her emotional side, leaving her vulnerable and in stark contrast to her public face of strength.

Stephanie Rossi is a force on stage, portraying the heartbroken Paula who's anger and frustration at being romantically left by Cecilia years before still swirls around inside her. She unleashes it with raw emotion, engulfing the audience in a relatable speech about how, in Cecilia's absence, Paula's life lost its happiness and meaning.

Lisa K Lanzi powerfully portrays the mentally unstable Julia who, despite not ever having been shot or injured, found herself paralysed after a deer hunting accident. Lanzi captures the hallucinogenic Julia who loses all sense of reality at times and appears haunted by 'judges' who emotionally and physically punish her for her feminine ways. This contrasts with the joyful, cheery and lively friend who shares Fefu's rather outrageous ways when we first meet her in Act One.

Through its unusual and experimental staging, strong cast of women and interesting themes including feminism, relationships between women and societal expectations, **Fefu and Her Friends** provides a unique theatre experience that is rare to find within any amateur or professional production.