

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune



STARC Productions. Bakehouse Theatre. 11 Oct 2019

As two middle-aged and unbeautiful people, Stefanie Rossi and Marc Clement start off with the challenge of playing up and ugly. They are both unconventional enough in good looks to swing it - just.

They have designed the set aptly with a vaguely vulgar bedroom and adjoining kitchen a la New York efficiency. They have their 'Noo Yawk' accents, oh so emphatically exact.

So where's the rub in this production directed by Tony Knight as is the tradition in this three-person company? Perhaps it is that Rossi and Clement are actors for whom intimacy comes naturally. As they work through the developments and setbacks of the couple in this 1980s romantic comedy by Terrance McNally, there is a streak of archness, as if they have to try to be strangers.

Rossi depicts the awkwardness of the middle-aged waitress with a lot of fussing and flicking of the famous Rossi locks and incessant fretful costume-primping. Less may be more.

As Frankie, she is testing the waters of potential romance with Johnny, the short order cook she's fancied for some time across the counter. He is looking desperately for love and a soul mate, grasping at background coincidences to underscore his hopes and grasping at Frankie's body with scary desperation. Clement has him seeming really give-him-an-inch-and-he'll-take-a-mile creepy and one wishes, as Frankie tries to make him leave her apartment, that he would actually go. He's like a drunken error to be sorely regretted in the morning and never seen again. Please.

The sex scenes are well-handled, an interesting balance between lust and repulsion.

In ambivalent desperation, Frankie tries to trust the groping neediness of Johnny. Therein, the play is something of a sad lesson for one and all. And, as a comedy, it is gruellingly sad.

There is optimism as the two lonely people in the big city look out the window at the break of dawn, but the audience is left to ponder their future.

Samela Harris

When: 11 to 19 Oct

Where: Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com