

Peggy Pickit Sees the Face of God



Joh Hartog Productions. Bakehouse Theatre. 6 Jun 2019

Carole and Martin have returned after six years mercy work somewhere in the Third World. Their old besties from med school days invite them to dinner. They have stayed in touch over the years but they also have grown apart.

German playwright Roland Schimmelfennig uses two dolls, little plastic Peggy Pickit belonging to the five-year-old daughter of the now-very-comfortable couple who stayed at home, and a simple hand-carved wooden doll brought back as a gift by the childless overseas

volunteers. With sponsorship help from the friends, they cared for a needy child in that other world but political upheaval prevented their bringing her home.

These facts unravel through the course of pre-dinner drinks and a dinner eaten on stage.

Schimmelfennig uses an almost cinematic stop-start dramatic device to reveal the undercurrents of the couples' emotions and through Joh Hartog's very snappy direction and with equally snappy lighting from Stephen Dean, this freeze frame effect gives the play a magnificent life force.

While it is dealing with difficult issues of political extremes and delicate issues of strained marriages and friendships, this is an extremely entertaining theatre work. The characters are credible. The themes are relevant and thought-provoking. The script is vital and full of sparks and swipes and snipes, delivered with vigour and savage humour by the four actors.

Hartog has adorned the little Bakehouse stage with side-by-side living-room and dining-room settings and, somehow, it looks really expansive. Thereon, a freshly prepared cold dinner and a loaf of welcome home-made bread are consumed by the actors, along with a lot of stage alcohol, as the complex fast-forwarded and rewound facets of the storyline are delivered.

There is not a dull moment. The play sings with tension and the sorrows of the human condition. It has been compared to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf* and, indeed, there is a common thread.

Krystal Brock, as homecoming Carol, has a heartbreaking aura of bravado masking disappointment, while being slightly don't-care dishevelled. Lucy Markiewicz is the proud mother in her snug bourgeois world, inventing spookily cute play interactions between the two dolls. Both women are secretly jealous of the other.

The men are more cynical and just as two-faced. David Hirst as home front Frank is exquisitely supercilious while Brendan Cooney plays it wise, world-weary, and lost.

This is a magically engrossing piece of theatre, profoundly satisfying and very highly recommended indeed.

And, oh, after all the sturm und drang, it has an utterly perfect ending.

Samela Harris

When: 6 to 15 Jun

Where: Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com