

## Reasonable Doubt



By Suzie Miller. STARC Productions. Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. Sept 12-22, 2018

*Reasonable Doubt* is a play written by Australian NIDA graduate and award-winning playwright Suzie Miller.

It is an interesting piece, addressing the 'what ifs' of life - reminiscent of the film *Sliding Doors*. The premise is that two people - Anna (Stefanie Rossi) and Mitchell (Marc Clement) - who two years earlier had been on a hung jury together, reunite on the eve of a retrial. They meet in a hotel room following a reunion of the original jury. Both are married, and the implication is that a night was spent together following

the original trial due to a mutual attraction. We are immediately drawn into what we at first believe will be an illicit dalliance.

Anna, we discover, is obsessed with Mitchell. In the opening scenes, she flutters about nervously, circling and bouncing around Mitchell, as her excitement in seeing him again bursts forth. He, however, is enigmatic- confusingly dour and restrained in places and then flirting childishly. The audience is drawn in as a jury itself, watching this onion slowly being peeled.

We believe at first that this meeting is sexually driven, but what unfolds is much more interesting - a seductive dance of words - as we find that both protagonists harbour secrets and that what we believe to be true in the beginning is carefully inverted by the end. This is the most fascinating element of the play for me - that these people are jurors making decisions about someone's life, but that they themselves have questionable morals and motivations. Who should truly decide the fate of others- is anyone so free from guilt themselves that they have that right?



Rossi does a fine job - somewhat playful and innocent initially - shedding this persona and revealing gradually throughout the play that her motives and morals are not as we initially believe. Her performance is strong and varied.

Clement, whilst a strong actor, portrays the stiff and tortured Mitchell competently, but I felt his performance could have built the sexual tension more in places, to truly convince me why Anna would stalk and idolise him.

The script is very clever - it has the potential to be a very tense thriller and in places this goal is achieved. The underlying messages about how moment-by-moment decisions, based on what we think is the truth, can have major consequences is extremely interesting.

Director Tony Knight skilfully crafts the words into an unsettling voyeuristic ride that has the audience constantly jolted not only by the twists and turns in the plot, but the unnerving punctuation of phones ringing.

The set, whilst very simple, gives context and allows the actors to create the drama without too much distraction. On opening night one blackout appeared misplaced and sadly interrupted the tension, but on the whole, the lighting, by Stephen Dean was effective in its starkness.

*Reasonable Doubt*, at 60 minutes running time is quite a rollercoaster ride. We are left wondering what the final outcome is, to make our own decisions and ponder about how many times throughout the play we jumped to conclusions based on minimal evidence. How does this tendency play out in a courtroom context, one wonders?

Shelley Hampton – Stage Whispers