

BIOGRAPHY: A GAME

[Bakehouse Theatre Company](#)

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Until 20 Aug 2016

Review by [Anthony Vawser](#)

There's a game waiting to be played on the table – and the table is set on a stage – which closely resembles a life-size version of the game on the table...People and words start to fill the spaces and make their movements, and we appear to be watching a play within a play – but then the boundary between 'real' dialogue and staged dialogue begins to blur, while the director and his lead performer appear to switch 'roles' with each other...

If you long for a theatrical experience that engages the intellect, that encourages imaginative interpretation, and that exists in more than two easily digestible dimensions, Max Frisch's "Biography: The Game" should fit the bill. Director Joh Hartog has lately specialised in bringing to the Bakehouse Theatre productions that both challenge and stimulate; he deserves commendation for the willingness to stretch an audience potentially out of its comfort zone.

At first, the action feels like a mere variation on the kind of 'theatre sports' that high school or university drama students will find familiar, and the tone of the piece is set by the light, bright characterisations. When the focal point of the play – and the balance of power on stage – starts shifting in a slippery-yet-subtle manner, interest and excitement begin to build, steadily growing throughout the first act, reaching something of a peak by interval.

Though the long-standing conventions of commercial theatre may mean that we desire, on one level, to become 'naturally' involved with the characters being enacted on stage, the deconstruction and interruptions that we witness force us to view and interpret this presentation differently from 'the norm'. Are these people really just playing roles, or is this a reflection of how they have attempted to conduct their daily existence? It is quietly thrilling to ponder such issues.

Perhaps "Biography: A Game" is attempting to determine whether empathy can be generated in a theatre for fictional human beings even while their status as a playwright's pawns is being explicitly framed and constantly reinforced for an audience. On the chess board of this particular stage (within a stage), the characters are forced by a director to relinquish control of their lives, and to cast subterfuge aside; the resulting motivational honesty can have a brutal impact.

The lead performances are finely balanced between blithe comedy and poignant insight. Tim Lucas' Hannes Kürmann is an outstandingly accomplished and engaging portrayal, while Krystal Brock exudes magnetism to spare in the role of Antoinette Stein, while skilfully negotiating the nuances of her role. Adam Carter, as The Director, captures an unsettling blend of harmless passivity and mysterious malevolence.

The level of intrigue does tend to dip in the second half, as some scenarios begin to feel redundant or repetitive. Patrick Clements and Lisa Harper Campbell manage to inject some rather broad comedy into the proceedings with their variety of supporting roles, but these moments threaten to undermine and unbalance the tone of the piece, while tending to distract from the generally riveting dynamic between the central characters of Kürmann and Stein.

If you wonder whether history has true meaning, or if the human race imposes its own sense of significance and order onto the past so that we may keep our minds from tumbling into an existential void, "Biography: A Game" will be on your level. Those who appreciate superb performances will also be glad they came. Hats off to Bakehouse producers Pamela Munt and Peter Green for their faith in Adelaide audiences to accept theatre that challenges.