

## BIOGRAPHY: A GAME Presents A Fascinating Premise



Reviewed by Ewart Shaw, Friday 5th August 2016

**Biography: A Game** is the latest production at that very busy venue, the Bakehouse Theatre.

What can our young actors do if they're not snapped up by a vampire franchise, relocated to Ramsay Street or Summer Bay? Well, they can keep their skills sharp by taking part in plays like this, in a small venue, working with a director both perceptive and sympathetic, with a text full of potential.

The title tells you everything. The play tells you differently.

The stage platform is a chess board, and there's another chess set, not yet in play, on the coffee table. A man and a woman, and a director, then they replay that bit, and talk about options. If she stays the night, what then? If he misses the faculty meeting, and his rival is appointed, what does that mean for his career? The man is Hannes Kurmann, sociologist and possibly member of the Communist party. This is Pre-unification Germany. She is Antoinette Stein, possibly a gallery owner, certainly his lover, perhaps his wife, but that's not certain. And the director? Therapist?

Hannes Kurmann is, as the play progresses, looking back at his life from a perspective we only reach in the final minutes, exploring all those 'what ifs' that point to the moments in our lives when a major change occurs, even if we don't register it at the time. Two other people, male and female, take on supporting roles, the housekeeper, the wife's architect boyfriend, the stage management crew.

Playwright **Max Frisch**'s dreamlike play has touches of Pirandello and Sartre, even Pinter, anchored in this production by director Joh Hartog and his cast, with performances that are finely detailed in their physical expression.

Tim Lucas is Hannes, hard drinking bearded academic, whose attempts at rewriting his biography are the core of the play, partnered by Kristal Brock as Antoinette, the woman he is remembering to forget, and failing. It's a very effective partnership. Adam Carter, in thick rimmed spectacles and with his hair drawn back into a pony tail, is the regisseur, and **Patrick Clements** and Lisa Harper Campbell are the two assistants, Harper Campbell having great fun as a series of maids and housekeepers. The ensemble feeling in the cast is very strong and, as each performance takes place, the pacing and the timing will only become tighter. I saw the second preview, in a packed Bakehouse Theatre, and while previews are generally not reviewed, there was no sense of anything unfinished or lacking in this intriguing play.

Cancer cell, or prison cell, which is the most constricting? Which is the life sentence? Is Hannes guilty of anything more than rewriting his past? Even if you don't care about the angst of middle aged men, you'll certainly find moments which will catch your attention and stay with you.

There's a line in the play which tells you the text has been tweaked a little, because Tim Lucas is maybe a decade or two younger than the role expects, and the old theatrical adage that if you produce a gun, you have to use it, also makes an appearance, or not. Frisch's original version had a cast of thirty two. This cast of five is more than up to the challenge.

Stephen Deane and Matthew Chapman provide their usual high level of technical support.

Photo credit: Michael Errey