

Biography: A Game

Bakehouse Theatre. 6 Aug 2016



Swiss dramatist Max Frisch's *Biography: A Game*, delves deeply into this need we have to believe it might be possible, somehow, if we could, to change our lives to improve it from the moments it tanked. We all want our life biography to be perfect, without regret.

Life has goals and obstacles, and is competitive; much like chess. Director/Designer Joh Hartog's set references this, with its raised chess set platform in wood tones on which sits a coffee table, with a chess set with pieces as if a game's already been played. A couch, glass top wooden cabinet, desk, chair, leather lounge chair and floor lamp shade offset the coffee

table. It is cosy, middle class, theatrical.

Frisch's human chess game with five human pieces takes place on a theatre stage. *Biography: A Game* is a play within a play. The tension generated between the sense on one hand, we seem to be watching a rehearsed theatre work, on the other, a real life relationship unravelling, is key to the gripping power of this production.

Hannes Kürmann (Tim Lucas) arrives home at 2am to find his partner Antoinette Stein (Krystal Brock) has just arrived before him, not in bed as expected. There's confusion. She wants to stay up, pours a wine. Mild disagreement plays out. He has to go to work in the morning.

Stage right is a desk at which the Director (Adam Carter) and his assistants (Lisa Harper Campbell and Patrick Clements) sit. At the Director's command, the scene stops. He replays it himself as Hannes, allowing Antoinette a different mode of play, all in demonstration for Hannes. The scene resumes. It ends badly. Hannes is not happy.

So begins a 'game' in which Hannes battles, more than works, with the Director to make changes in his relationships and professional life in such a way things will be pleasing, secure, worthy. The struggle to control events, control people, control the story Hannes embarks on becomes a never ending trail of confusion, fearful introspection, fear, regret and longing. However Hannes works to stop/start or rewind events he cannot control; consequences springing from his choices.

Can we as an audience dismiss all this as a mere play, or should we allow ourselves a deeper, scarier relationship with Hannes' genuinely frightening, emotionally crushing experiences, lightened as they are by superbly timed comic moments?

Is this life as we live it? Frisch's essential question asked in this play, alongside, is there anything we can really do?

Hartog's cast is a gutsy one, offering powerfully rich performances in which that delicate line between the comic and deeply tragic is maintained with exquisite perfection. Tim Lucas's Hannes and Adam Carter's The Director play off each other in a perfect devil-tempting-the-innocent relationship. Krystal Brock's Antoinette burns with subtle energy and intent, while Patrick Clements and Lisa Harper Campbell's stage hand/bit character roles enliven the dark pall of Frisch's writing beautifully.

David O'Brien – Barefoot Review