

Constellations at the Bakehouse Theatre - Review

[Julia Wakefield – Weekend Notes](#)

Romantic comedy combines with quantum physics



Marc Clement and Stefanie Rossi in their roles as Roland and Marianne

Whatever will we do without the [Bakehouse Theatre](#)? This icon of the Adelaide performing arts scene is closing down soon – after thirty-four successful years. Their lease will not be renewed after May. The Bakehouse Theatre made its name as one of Adelaide's only permanent 'black box' theatres, which is essentially a blank canvas from which small companies can conjure unique dramatic worlds, using the minimum of props and plenty of imagination. Audience spaces are small but intimate and friendly, and prices are affordable. These places only exist when funding is available and/or landlords are generous with the rent.

The Bakehouse is bowing out in style, after a highly successful Fringe season this year. Three shows are scheduled for the final two months, and the last one of all, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, promises to be a stunner.

The first of the farewell shows, *Constellations*, premiered last night. It's a play that received rave reviews at its debut at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2012. The playwright, Nick Payne, has a number of other successful productions to his credit, and *Constellations* was performed in New York, Toronto and Beijing before it had its premiere in Australia in 2018, in Perth. It is being performed here in Adelaide by a small company, *Starc Productions*, which specialises in two-person plays that are generally defined as 'romances'. Traditionally, a romance is "a journey of discovery, acceptance, transformation and connection – or in this case, re-connection". All its productions so far have been staged at the Bakehouse.

This play manages to combine a romantic relationship with quantum theory, beekeeping and

the notion of free will. When the play begins we have the illusion that this will be a romantic comedy, but it is apparent that something far more complicated is at work. We are being asked to question the whole traditional concept of linear existence. Instead, we are presented with an infinite number of parallel universes that contain an infinite number of possible futures, depending on what we as individuals choose to say or do.

If you have an impatient nature, even the brevity (75 minutes) of this play might not suit you. There is a lot of repetition because numerous stories are played out, triggered by each separate action that each character takes in each parallel universe. Yes, we do reach the end of one story, but we also reach the end or the middle of several other stories, and we are left with the realisation that all of these stories will continue into the future, with multiple trajectories. But if you love performance, you will be amazed by the virtuoso professionalism of the two actors, Stefanie Rossi and Marc Clement, who play the roles of Marianne and Roland.

Stefanie Rossi sweeps through a pantheon of emotions as she reiterates parallel speeches that are delivered in different situations in each universe. Just one of these speeches, delivered in half a dozen different ways, would be the perfect audition material for an actor wishing to impress a director with his/her versatility. Stephanie demonstrates her versatility with fervent authenticity. The character of Roland, in contrast, is more passive, reactive rather than proactive, which gives Marc Clement less variety of opportunities for role-playing. But his portrayal of Roland is completely convincing and at times quite endearing, when his genuine human desire for a loving relationship is brushed off by scientist Marianne's ambivalent behaviour.

Starc's director, Tony Knight, was formerly Head of Acting at NIDA (the National Institute of Dramatic Art), and trained some of Australia's most celebrated actors, including Cate Blanchett, Sam Worthington and Anna Torv. He has also taught, directed and lectured internationally, and currently teaches from his own studio here in Adelaide.

Stefanie Rossi and Marc Clement both have an impressive list of acting roles, nationally as well as locally. Marc is also a writer/director/cinematographer/editor, and he and Stefanie run a media/production company, *Leading Line Productions*. And yes, you may also have seen Marc on the music scene – he just happens to be a musician/lead singer/songwriter/bass player/guitarist, and has written a musical...

And let's not forget the Lighting Designer, Stephen Dean. He is the Bakehouse Theatre's resident lighting designer/technical manager and has designed many productions in SA, Sydney, Edinburgh and London. The lighting plays a major role in this performance: the ambient illumination suggests we are not in a static world at all, but in a constantly fluctuating universe, and the rapid scene changes call for perfectly synchronised on/off spotlights. The timing, in a show that questions the existence of time itself, was impeccable.