

Theatre review: Biography - A Game

THEATRE

Director Joh Hartog has designed a set on a chessboard on which the central character, researcher Hannes Kurmann, plays the game of deciding which aspects of his life he would alter if he could.



Tim Lucas and Adam Carter in *Biography: A Game*. Photo: Michael Errey

Kurmann (played by Tim Lucas) responds to a theatre director (Adam Carter), who offers him choices as if he were an actor in a play.

The situation in *Biography: A Game* – written by Swiss playwright Max Frisch – is Faustian and Mephistophelian in the way the director manipulates Kurmann. And when he looks as if he has made a decision to change his personal circumstances, there is some unforeseen consequence that is either as bad as the original action or leads to pretty much the same outcome.

The first act has Kurmann in his apartment at 2am with Antoinette (his future wife); alterations are made to dialogue or action that are likely to result in her not spending the night with him, which would affect their future relationship. Kurmann and Antoinette find themselves with the inevitable choices of whether to stay or go; whether to have another drink, play chess or flirt and have sex – any minor choice may have a lasting effect on the quality of their lives.

Hartog has assembled a good cast for this production, although Lucas's over-use of ironic smiles and nervous laughs is disconcerting and Carter's angry, chastising approach lacks subtlety. Krystal Brock successfully expresses the different elements of Antoinette's personality, while Patrick Clements demonstrates excellent variety and convincing characterisations in a range of roles, including as Antoinette's lover and a union representative.

Lisa Harper Campbell plays the director's assistant, who follows the script of Kurmann's life, and she comes into her own in several cameos: she plays lovers, acquaintances, maids and employees of Kurmann. Campbell has a wonderful ear for accents and excellent comic timing, especially as the hunched-over elderly maid who serves tea.

In terms of atmosphere, Stephen Dean creates interesting lighting effects in a restricted space.

This production arouses curiosity about the final outcome, with some serious Kafkaesque nightmare moments and quality comedy. The idea of life being a game and how fascinating it would be if we could alter some of our life choices may have been novel in the 1960s, but the writing, despite some considerable strength, slips into sentimentality.

The end result is that we experience a show of interest rather than gripping drama. For the journey to have been more significant, we needed a greater sense of life being a game, a gamble, and that we all throw the dice and live with the result or continue playing until ...

Biography: A Game is playing at the Bakehouse Theatre until August 20.



Cast members Tim Lucas, Krystal Brock and Patrick Clements.
Photo: Michael Errey