

## Last of The Red Hot Lovers

Barefoot Review by David O'Brien

STARC Productions. Bakehouse Theatre. 24 Jan 2019



50 years ago, man landed on the moon and the musical *Hair* was encouraging people to drop out and get high and the philosophy of free love inspired open relationships.

Neil Simon's 1969 three act take on this cultural moment, *Last of The Red Hot Lovers*, holds up extremely well today and not just because couples have been having affairs since forever. Simon's writing seeks to understand how social forces shape this dynamic, bending and twisting primal humanity against social constructions of 'faithful' relationships.

What's driving 23 years happily married Barney (Marc Clement), and the three women he initiates first meetings with in hope of starting an affair, to

make such a move? Needing something new? Fear of missing out? Illicit thrills and spills?

Director Tony Knight deftly manages Simon's magnificent three acts, each a rich, power packed playlet in its own right, while successfully developing the grand challenge of the piece - Barney's slow, almost indistinguishable growing awareness of why he's always seeking 'something' in another.

That imperceptible growth gradient comes into play thanks not just to three brilliantly written female characters on the page Barney encounters, but their fully realised social, emotional and sexual humanity in performance by Stefanie Rossi.

Elaine, Bobbi and Jeanette span the social spectrum of Barney's lived world and desire/fantasy. They challenge it too. Because by meeting with Barney, they're admitting to a need they feel compelled to action by. For different reasons. Reasons Barney has serious difficulties consciously acknowledging. None of these women have a problem with their choice to meet a married man in his Mothers' apartment. Issues, yes. Honestly expressed. For Barney. In the too hard basket.

This conundrum is expressed in dialogue and performance with great gusto, humour and deep compassion.

Simon's goal of uncovering and exploring the truly human, pained, impassioned and newly aware scope of relationship possibility/impossibility is profoundly rigorous, yet emotionally open. Marc Clement and Stefanie Rossi's richly honest performance ensures this gets through to an audience.

Electric night at the theatre, almost three plays for one ticket experience.