

# OYSTERS (ADELAIDE FRINGE)

Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide Reviewed on February 22, 2019 by *Gordon Forester - Limelight*

## ***A gritty evening with Brahms reveals a theatrical pearl. 4 STARS***

We are at a shindig with Johannes Brahms. It is to celebrate the first performance of the German's Violin Concerto. Many of his friends are here, and tonight they're going to party like it's 1878. Love, jealousy, scorn, passion and plenty of booze are all invited. What could possibly go wrong?



**Nicholas Collett and Neil Savage in *Oysters* at the Adelaide Fringe. Photo supplied**

Written by Neil Salvage who also plays Brahms (and others) with a persuasive ferocity, Oyster Creatives' *Oysters* is a confronting tale. Salvage's compelling attempts to paint Brahms as a drunk, obnoxious, pompous expletive, still leaves us unable to escape the extraordinary beauty of the classical composer's oeuvre. It creates a conflict in which we seek to find the identity of the tormenter behind the mastermind. It's as clever as it is disquieting.

Actor and Producer Nicholas Collett skilfully plays a raft of characters – violinist Joseph Joachim is our favourite for this showing – to great effect, seamlessly transitioning from one role to another with no loss of dramatic tempo. Stefanie Rossi as Clara Schumann is exceptional. Resplendent in black, she conveys pain, icy bitterness and frustration, whilst maintaining the composure of the accomplished performer Schumann undoubtedly was.

Solid directing from Amy Bonsall gives these consummate stage actors the space in which to show off their craft. The tableau scene creates an effective change of pace and exceptional costuming, lightning fast character changes, and a score-filled backdrop add much to this poignant story.

*Oysters* features a cast of largely unlikeable characters, but what they lack in amiability they make up for in convincing motivations and development. Tight scripting and pithy one-liners seek to evoke thoughts about the cost of fame, the value of art and the definition and price of success.

The concept of music being Brahms' near-constant companion seems plausible and if this is Ahram Min's role in addition to violinist, it is ably played, if somewhat underutilised. When we seek to understand the torturer that drives the genius, it is not clearly to be found in Min's character and so we, just as Brahms is depicted as doing, turn to the bottle for explanation. It leaves us wanting.

This Australian premiere suffers a little from our expectation that this is a dark comedy. The fight scene is a highlight and reveals glimpses into what this production could be if the "dark comedy" leant more heavily on the latter.

*Oysters* is a gritty, warts-and-all expose of one of our favourite composers and his relationship to the people who call him friend. A stone-cold dose of reality mixed with some unforgettable tunes, makes this hour-long drama, a theatrical pearl.

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**Oyster Creatives' *Oysters* is the Adelaide Fringe until March 16**