

## By Cat Commander. Adelaide Fringe 2016. Bakehouse Theatre. February 15-27, 2016

One of only eight events to secure a grant through the Adelaide Fringe's Cultural Fund for this year's Fringe, the South Australian Premiere of *The Last Time I Saw Richard* is about people who drift in life. The often hilarious and sometimes poignant work reflects on personal isolation, unfulfilled ambition and the self-perpetuating mistakes we all make.



Written by Cat Commander and directed by Craig Behenna for Adelaide independent theatre company five.point.one, the play stars Elizabeth Hay (*Danger 5*, *Volpone* and *Jesikah*- STC, TV's *ANZAC GIRLS*) and Charles Mayer (*The Popular Mechanicals* for STC, *ANZAC GIRLS*, *Sam Fox Extreme Adventures* and *Deadline Gallipoli*).

Although possibly a little too long, *The Last Time I Saw Richard* is an example of the best in new Australian writing.

The narrative is the rather sad yet very funny story of April and Richard. She is lonely and in a job that necessitates many stays in hotels. He is older; a middle-aged actor who drifts along, no longer winning the sort of roles he seeks. The pair both have issues in terms of living in the shallow end of life, but are constantly drawn to each other. Each uses the other as a crutch, meeting often in various hotel rooms. They muse about their lives and feed off each other's problems. This is a very perceptive and real story about an interdependent relationship between flawed people.

Charles Mayer is marvelous as Richard, expertly developing Richard's various personas. He shines as a womanising, wise-cracking man who has never grown up and who still thinks he'll break into the big time overseas in Hollywood or New York. At the same time, Mayer lets Richard's other side ooze through; a man who, deep down, recognises his best opportunities in life may have passed him by. Mayer's fine sense of comedy is obvious in his funny yet heartfelt performance.

Elizabeth Hay is excellent as April, who is frequently in and out of meaningless relationships. Hay does well in maintaining the self-protective barrier April puts up around herself; an intelligent, observant woman who will let Richard delve only a little into her life, but who, like Richard, is directionless.



Brad Williams is an actor but has also brought his tech skills to his position as Artistic Director for five.point.one. *The Last Time I Saw Richard* is an example of his interest in exploring the storytelling potential of projection. Frequently-changing projections on background screens give colour and context to the multiple scenes that may otherwise have seemed claustrophobic at times, set as they are on an almost bare stage that represents various sterile hotel rooms.

Despite the austere setting and presence of only two actors, Craig Behenna's innovative direction keeps the action varied and interesting. Silence is used very well as a device, while sound and lighting complement the narrative

well.

Promoted in the Fringe Guide as a seventy-minute play, *The Last Time I Saw Richard* is actually longer than this and perhaps a little over-written, particularly in the middle scenes. Even so, Cat Commander's play is edgy, sexy, intriguing and very perceptive. It contains graphic language, but this is appropriate in the play's context.

What may happen in the future is left a little up in the air, which may not satisfy some, but for me this is exactly the right conclusion given this couple lives life in an open-ended, un-planned way.

This is an excellent Australian work about how the stark realities of life can intervene in the quest to realise dreams.

Lesley Reed – *Stage Whispers*