

TWO – STAGE WHISPERS REVIEW



By Jim Cartwright. STARC Productions. Bakehouse Theatre (SA). July 4-14, 2018

There's froth, plenty of body and a lasting after taste in the beer they serve at the Northern England working class pub that's the setting for STARC Productions' staging of Jim Cartwright's quirky play *TWO*.

Director Tony Knight relies very much on the imagination of the audience to envisage the bar environment. Denoted only by a handful of scattered chairs and backed by two screens behind which actors will change costume for each of the characters we are to meet, the floor is the standout when the audience enters.

Tiny splashes of intermingling, predominantly gold colour shine in places on the black floor, creating the appearance of a star-filled sky. Perhaps the effect is intended to denote those highly patterned, beer-stained carpets one sees in old pubs, but on Opening Night the instant impression for me was of randomness, which is fitting in view of the uniquely different and varied examples of the human condition soon to come through the pub's doors.



There are only two actors, but Stefanie Rossi and Marc Clement each play seven diverse and complex characters through monologues and short scenes. They change voice, body language, hairstyle and facial appearance for the rapidly rotating vignettes, all the time supported only by relatively minor costume changes and, due to the minimal props, some skilled miming.

They achieve each characterisation superbly.

As the fourteen characters appear and occasionally reappear the magic, the unexpected surprises and even the powerful drama emerge through the mostly unvoiced history of each character, particularly of the Landlord and Landlady. The backstory behind the latter couple comes into heartbreaking and stark relief in the closing scene.

Rossi and Clement are wonderful, lulling us with gentle elderly people, along with the swaggerers, the flirts and some very funny characters; only to slap our shocked faces with the controlling and coercive menace lurking beneath some personas that results in the submission or desperation of others we meet.

The scene between Roy and Lesley, the one with the poignantly 'real' Old Man, together with the sad Little Boy waiting outside the pub for his Dad are so good that they still stay with me, a day later.

The final scene between the Landlord and Landlady is brilliantly performed and one of catharsis for the couple. Perhaps there's a new beginning for them ahead. We can only wonder at their future as we experience yet more of the 'aftertaste' of this pub's potent refreshments.

Tony Knight's expert direction is unobtrusive, allowing the actors to truly embody each character, yet he ensures the pace is unrelenting.

Stephen Dean's crisply cued lighting is very fine and emotive of the dimly lit pub bar setting. The sound design is also very good.

STARC Productions' *TWO* is an absorbing reflection of real life seen through the bottom of a pub glass and with such high quality on offer from this new company, I say, 'Cheers! Bring me another!'

Lesley Reed

