



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

### Flying Penguin Productions

Queen's Theatre, Playhouse Lane

Until 19 May 2007

Review by Stephanie Johnson

"The Birthday Party" is a bizarre menacing story set in a single room with dialogue peppered with silences and cryptic small talk. It is difficult to define the motivations of the characters, the precise nature of the story or the conclusion. And yet this is riveting theatre.

Director David Mealor has crafted a gem with Harold Pinter's Kafkaesque play, written 50 years ago.

Mealor's creative team has superbly crafted the setting of a kitchen of a rundown post-war seaside boardinghouse. Mary Moore's brilliantly stressed kitchen furniture is set on a stage surrounded by the audience on three sides creating a suitably uncomfortable feeling of involvement. Mark Pennington's lighting hues, in particular the blue, help create the feeling of seaside. Kerry Reid's costumes are appropriate post-war.

Sound also plays an integral role in this production with music by composer and musician Quentin "Quincy" Grant, and sound designer Andrew Howard's use of heightened volume for carefully selected small everyday sounds.

This black comedy opens with the breakfast of husband Petey (Geoff Revell) and wife Meg (Carmel Johnson) who run a decrepit boardinghouse. Together Revell and Johnson create magical well-rehearsed dance as a couple living a familiar mundane routine. Johnson is also integral in providing warmth and humour as the eager to please wife and landlady.

Rory Walker introduces the first real element of discomfort as the apparently ordinary guest, Stanley. Walker manages to portray a run of the mill man, who is simmering with unspoken tension and untold mystery. From the first moment that he walks on stage there is a whiff of a mental disturbance that perhaps lies behind the seemingly drab existence of his every day life.

As if to confirm this two mysterious men arrive as unexpected guests. The true intentions of McCann (William Allert) and Goldberg (Gerrard McArthur) are never fully explained, thus adding to the sense of off-putting danger. Allert is endearing and disconcerting as the obsessive compulsive Irishman, while McArthur is paradoxically charming and sinister as the ebullient Goldberg. Both Allert and McArthur capture the complexity of the shadowy suited strangers. Ksenja Logos' role as the young Lulu is also wonderfully evocative of the fine line walked between normalcy and danger.

All in all this is a production that has all of the ingredients that has made Harold Pinter a playwright of genius, and David Mealor a director cut from the same cloth.