



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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OLEANNA

Theatre Tours International/Guy Masterson Productions

Fringe Factory

Until 22 Mar 2009

Review by John Wells

A nervous, unsure and confused student (Carol – Joanne Hartstone) is failing her course. She desperately needs to pass, and meets her professor, imploring him to help her. The professor (John – Guy Masterson) is distracted, but agrees to guide her through her difficulties. His kindness is suffused with arrogance and an unequal power relationship, but is there more to this bargain? Is his apparent certainty that she will get an "A" a reflection of his confidence in his teaching or is there an unspoken quid pro quo? Are his touches reassuring or sexual? When Carol reports John to the tenure committee, his world is thrown into turmoil. Has he been manipulated or is he only the victim of his own prurient condescension?

David Mamet's unflinching play about sexual politics, the dishonesty of modern education and how the language of jargon obliterates communication, is tense, incendiary and gut-wrenching. The brilliant text is well served by two sensational performances by Hartstone and Masterson.

The most interesting artistic choice is how to pitch the relationship: is Carol stupid and naïve or is there some calculation in her, is she guileless or is there a whiff of coquettishness in her plea for help? Is John also naïve, closeted by his self-importance and secure in his world of semantics? Emma Lucia's assured direction offers no clear answers but the edge of sympathy is with the hapless academic. The savage ironies and complexities of this master-work are brought precisely to the performance by Lucia and her brilliant cast. Violent, uncompromising and uncomfortable, this play should be seen by all who appreciate intelligent and impeccably-performed theatre.

Rating: 4.5 stars (out of 5)