



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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VARIATION ON A THEME

The Stirling Players

Stirling Community Theatre

Until 5 Mar 2016

Review by Paige Mulholland

The slogan for "Variation on a Theme" is 'love is a gamble'. That may be true for love, but not for shows at the Stirling Community Theatre; the Stirling Players are well known for their consistent, high-quality shows, and "Variation on a Theme" is no exception.

The story centres around Rose, an aging, dying socialite who, after securing wealthy husband after wealthy husband, falls in love with a young ballet dancer, Ron. For the first time, Rose finds herself enjoying and craving the feeling of being needed, rather than the one who needs. Set in the glamorous 1950's, this Australian Premiere explores what it means to rely on someone and keeps the audience guessing about whether Rose will live out her life with Ron or German millionaire Kurt.

The play, with its dramatic entrances, manly face-offs and glamorous parties, is quite soap opera-esque (which could be good or bad, depending on how you feel about soap operas). Although the script was originally panned by critics, there are many things it does well; it has a good mix of humour and drama, a cast of complex characters, and an unpredictable storyline. Although there might be a plot hole or two, the script is definitely emotive enough to keep you interested.

Aside from a questionable accent here or there, the cast is generally very strong and very well-rehearsed. Allison Scharber makes plays an excellent Rose, keeping her tightly controlled and wildly emotional in the right places. Although Nick Duddy is obviously not the danseur that his character, Ron, claims to be, he captures the character's conflicted state with great sensitivity.

Julie Quick is both hilarious and heartwarming as Hattie, and delivered many of the funniest lines of the night, and Jonathan Pheasant is appropriately scary as Kurt. Poignantly capturing the lonely and closeted life of many gay men in the 50's, Alan Crawford's depiction of Sam feels true to life, and Kate van der Horst is strong as the ambitious but innocent Fiona – it's a shame her character doesn't play a more important role in the storyline.

The set was one of the stand-out elements of the performance – the aesthetic is perfect for the French Riviera in the 50's, and the space is detailed enough that there is plenty to look at, even if all the scenes take place in the same location. The light and bright colour scheme, too, feels just as you would expect a beachside villa to feel – airy and clean.

Overall, "Variation on a Theme" is good fun and a thoughtful commentary on power in relationships, if occasionally a little melodramatic. It may be the only chance to see this play performed in Australia for quite some time, so it is certainly worth a look.