



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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THE CLEAN HOUSE

Stirling Players

Stirling Community Theatre

Until 7 October

Review by Jamie Wright

Matilde, from Brazil, is a cleaner, but she doesn't like it; she'd rather be comedian like both her parents. Her employer, Lane, is a busy doctor married to Charles, an equally busy surgeon and (unsurprisingly), she isn't coping well with the fact her cleaner won't clean. Lane's sister Virginia, who loves to clean, can't comprehend that Lane doesn't want to clean her own house, and volunteers to help Matilde – and, in doing so, finds more than she bargained for in Charles's laundry basket.

It sounds a bit like the synopsis of a 70s farce (sans the vicar with ill-fitting trousers and a penchant for appearing at just the wrong time), but Sarah Ruhl's delightfully quirky comedy about life, love and death is another kind of animal entirely, tossing aside a lot of theatrical conventions as it goes. There's a thread of magical realism throughout, not unlike some of the South American-set novels of Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Isabel Allende or Louis de Bernières.

Director Kevin Burrett has done an excellent job of interpreting the somewhat unconventional text and assembled a talented cast to portray Ruhl's oddball set of characters and deliver her delightful dialogue – Andrea Cabanas Freitas (Matilde, who delivers many lines in Portuguese), Josephine Pugh (Lane), Jenny Penny (Virginia), Julie Quick (Ana) and Peter Davies (Charles). They're all on very different paths, but each is engaging and gives their character genuine depth, while also showing great comic timing on the many occasions wit is called for.

The five are frequently joined on stage by Ana Gabriela as 'Musician', who appears throughout playing guitar or tambourine and singing – but with added effect via her actions and expression.

Burrett also designed the set, which is minimalist without being too sparse, and there are some nice symbolic touches (as there are with costumes, by Viki Burrett) as the play progresses. There were a few issues with the projections, since on occasion the cast were blocking the screen or the stage was lit too brightly for the slides.

Short – with interval it runs for less than two hours – and sweet, this is a wonderful production of a play filled with laughter, tears and a kind of warmth not often seen on stage. Highly recommended.