



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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THE GOLDEN DRAGON

Bakehouse Theatre Company

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Until 22 July

Review by Paige Mulholland

The most important thing to say about "The Golden Dragon" is that it is a very weird show. Although the "worlds collide in a small Asian restaurant" plot summary may make it sound like something akin to "Love Actually" but with more spring rolls, the many intertwining narratives in this show are less "boy meets girl" and more "boy sees entire family living in the hole left by his decayed tooth". However, if you have a taste for weird (and tooth decay doesn't gross you out too much), it's also a twist-filled, twisted story that will keep you interested (and confused) until the end.

The show begins in the cramped, sweaty kitchen of The Golden Dragon, a Chinese-Thai-Vietnamese restaurant in a busy city. A young immigrant boy from China is suffering from an unbearable toothache, but, lacking official immigration papers or identification, is powerless to do anything about it. Throughout the show, his story intersects with the stories of those who visit the restaurant – a young, pregnant girl, her partner, her grandfather, the owner of the grocery next door, a pair of flight attendants, and, for reasons unknown until the end of the play, a cricket and an ant fighting to survive the harsh winter.

Peppered with alienating Brechtian techniques (think reading stage directions aloud and actors playing characters with opposite genders, ages and physical structures), the show is stylistically unusual, but that's nothing compared to the weird and wild plot. As the show progresses, the audience moves from reluctantly laughing as the actors dictate their own *short pause* for the fourteenth time to eerie silence as they witness harsh realities like sex trafficking, brutal violence, and families torn apart.

While white actors playing Asian roles makes sense – given that women are playing men and young actors are playing older characters and vice versa – it does seem remiss that white actors play both the white roles and the Asian roles. As is often the case, a more racially-diverse cast would not have gone astray in "The Golden Dragon".

Racial elements aside, the cast is hardworking, well-rehearsed and support each other impeccably through a complicated and challenging role. Juggling dense dialogue, constantly switching characters and an unusual dramatic style is no easy feat, but actors Brendan Cooney, Mark Healy, Clare Mansfield, Jo Pugh and Robbie Greenwell do so proficiently and generously – a true ensemble performance.

The set and costumes are simple and adaptable, easily accommodating the constantly changing settings and characters. The fact that, in the kitchen of the restaurant, food is being cooked live on stage is a nice touch – nothing gives Asian takeaway vibes quite like the smell of sesame oil. While this realistic touch seems at odds with many of the other stylistic choices in the play, all of which were designed to prevent the audience from suspending their disbelief, it also smells delicious, so who are we to fault it?

You'll be confused by many things in "The Golden Dragon". The plot, the style, even a few of the directorial choices. However, who's to say a little confusion is a bad thing?