



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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GROPING FOR WORDS

Tea Tree Players

Tea Tree Players Theatre

Until 13 Apr 2019

Review by Anthony Vawser

It's a relatively rare achievement for a stage play to effectively dramatise an important social issue while still succeeding as a human comedy. It's equally unusual for a play first staged in the 1980s to not fatally suffer the effects of dated attitudes and references. The title of "Groping for Words" may lead one to expect a relentlessly smutty and lazy farce from a bygone era, but Adrian Mole creator Sue Townsend's script is of a breed far more ambitious, more successful, and more special than that.

TTP's production, though slightly flawed in its staging at certain moments, is a satisfyingly sincere depiction of engaging characters, complicated and imperfect adults attempting to find their way through the challenges of existence, and striving to improve their chances of accomplishing worthy goals in life – by learning how to read and write. This is also a story of those who hide their difficulties behind bluster and bravado, and of those who reach out in an effort to assist those people who cannot conceal the evidence of potential that is not being fulfilled.

Samuel Creighton impressively injects his memorable role with unceasing energy, but skilfully keeps the brash loudmouth caretaker Kevin Muldoon recognisably human, even at his most objectionable. Adult educator Joyce Chalmers is given a quite lovely interpretation by Danni Fulcher, one which easily overcomes the obvious age difference between the performer and her character.

Aerobics (robotics?) enthusiast Thelma Churchill marks the debut adult performance for Keyarra Maur, who shows great promise in her appealingly understated and sympathetic portrayal. George Humphries is a tremendous asset playing George Bishop, the senior member of Joyce's literacy class; walking a fine and impressive balance between humour and poignancy, Humphries delivers a winning contribution.

Silvia Bolingbroke has directed her small cast generally very well, maintaining a good pace and achieving an ideal balance of the light-hearted and the serious. The most noticeable and bothersome misstep is an interlude of comical slapstick violence that is not well-timed nor convincingly-blocked, and which is dragged out beyond its ability to amuse. It could also be said that the climactic scenes centred on Kevin, as good as they are, could have been milked for even deeper drama and impact.

"Groping for Words" enthusiastically entertains while it tenderly touches the heart. It is a commendable choice for staging by the Tea Tree Players, and you should catch it while you can.