



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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I'LL BE BACK BEFORE MIDNIGHT

St Jude's Players

St Jude's Hall (Grundy Hall)

Until 13 April 2019

Review by Brian Godfrey

Traditionally, old fashioned British stage thrillers tend to be drawn out and extremely melodramatic with not much, if any, of what we now class as 'suspense'. But there are some gems and St Jude's Players have certainly found one in their latest production, "I'll Be Back Before Midnight".

After a few years away from theatre, experienced actor/director Ian Rigney has returned to direct this marvelous, murderous mystery – and we are so glad he is back (with a vengeance).

The play itself includes all the required elements of this type of genre: an isolated house in the middle of nowhere; a wife recovering from a nervous breakdown; her extremely devoted husband; his domineering sister; and, for comic relief, a local yokel who has a penchant for grisly ghost stories.

Rigney runs beautifully with all these clichés and throws in some wonderful scare tactics of his own. In the first five minutes of the play opening, there are probably as many screams, jumps and laughs.

The cast of four are absolutely marvelous, all delivering their individual characters perfectly. Leighton Vogt, as the husband, has a real Ealing Film Studios 'British Leading Man' vibe about him, with diction Professor Higgins would die for and a great designer 'disheveled' appearance. Miriam Keane portrays his sister with a haughtiness and slight menace that would make many a mysterious 'femme fatale' jealous. The local yokel comic relief is perfectly supplied by Tim Cousins, with his delightful country 'burr' and his skill at nailing the laughs.

The extremely hard role of the nervous, stressed-out wife is portrayed magnificently by Carolina Kaye. In a role that could be (and usually is) played extremely over the top, Kaye manages to make the wife a person rather than a character, with nuances and realistic tears, which are more trickles than a flood, and a well-controlled hysteria that never ventures into the realm of shrillness or screechiness (although her scream is fantastic!).

This sort of play relies heavily on atmosphere and this production has it by the fright load, not only from the cast and Rigney's Hitchcockian direction, but from Don Oakley and Mary-Jane Minear's delightfully dank set design, and Leigh Wheatley's almost torch-driven lighting design.

"I'll Be Back Before Midnight" will have you home before midnight, but maybe jumping and laughing at the shadows. This is a thrillingly good fun night at the theatre.