



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## A NIGHT AT THE THEATRE: 5 COMIC ONE-ACT PLAYS

**STARC Productions**

**Bakehouse Theatre**

Until 27 Jul 2019

Review by Sarah Westgarth

The work of David Ives eschews conventional narrative structures and theatrical conventions in order to serve the ideas and concepts he is exploring above all else. STARC Productions' presentation of five of his comic one-act plays, initially published together under the title 'All In The Timing', opens with director, Tony Knight, talking casually to the audience, providing some background about the playwright and his role in the field of American absurdism, and the company's rationale behind staging the work. Knight plays minor roles throughout the show, and gives a similar introduction before each new scene. There's a familiarity in this approach; it has a messy, spontaneous feel. In doing this, Knight and the two actors—Stefanie Rossi and Marc Clement—are giving the audience permission to be confused or challenged about what they see unfold throughout the show, and to go along for the ride.

'A Night at the Theatre' has the irregular beats of classic absurdism with a modern flair. Some of the references might not be clear, the points being made don't always land, and sometimes it is downright obscure—but every scene is consistently poignant, interesting and very funny.

The chemistry between Rossi and Clements is electrifying, which is crucial, as every one of the scenes relies on the quick exchange of language and ideas, and the central concepts all focus on the interactions between people. They are nearly seamless in their stage presence together, effectively playing the moments of intense connection and awkwardness as required. Their physicality is always on point, and has clearly been carefully calibrated in the blocking and other stage work. Their expression is also excellent, though their accent work was often a misstep, never feeling authentic and at worst being grating. It could be argued flawless accents were not essential as the actors are mostly representing types rather than trying to create realism, but it was still noticeably distracting.

Aside from this their to-and-fro fires on all cylinders throughout, working particularly well in 'Sure Thing' and 'English Made Simple'. Ives' script allows for little room to stumble or pause, and both appear so completely in the moment at all times, bringing the audience with them, even when the meaning is ambiguous. Each act has a slightly different rhythm, and the final two have the tendency to drag, but the pace of the piece as a whole stays remarkably consistent. This allows for each scene to be connected thematically, but also be appreciated on its own. The staging is all very simple, with props often being in open view, and the actors making their changes behind two screens at the back. This adds to the intimate feel of the whole production—nothing is meant to appear too polished or perfect. After all, we don't have all the answers; we're mostly just asking questions.

'A Night at the Theatre' is challenging, but never in a way that is inaccessible. It is witty and engaging throughout, and the way it explores the importance of making connections with people, and how difficult it truly is to know one another when all we have are words, is something quite special. Kudos must be given whenever a company tries to do something experimental, that they've never done before, in order to keep the theatrical process interesting for not only the creative team, but the audience as well. If nothing else, 'A Night at the Theatre' provokes discussion and brings delight, which is exactly what a night at the theatre should do.