



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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HIBERNATION

The State Theatre Company of South Australia

Dunstan Playhouse
Until 28 August 2021

Review by Helen Karakulak

Directed by Mitchell Butel, the State Theatre Company's production of "Hibernation" is clever and compelling as it offers a thought-provoking cautionary tale. Written by Finegan Kruckemeyer, the play invites audiences to imagine where we might wake up one day.

The production begins in Canberra and introduces the domineering and crude Minister for Space Exploration Warwick Joyce, played by Mark Saturno. Saturno is commanding in this role, making a convincingly frustrated minister whose job it is to find another planet for people to flock to after destroying their own. Enter Ansuya Nathan as the ambitious Emily Metcalfe, a staffer with a bold idea that favours a sacrifice for nature rather than running away. She proposes a policy that a calendar years' worth of hibernation will remedy the effects of modern industrialisation and neglect of the planet. Nathan's characterisation is brilliant as the poised Emily, who goes on to make a name for herself internationally as the scorned innovator behind hibernation as the play continues.

The timeliness of this production must be noted, as increasing pleas are being heard from climate scientists and activists around the world. It follows the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth assessment report declaring that we must take urgent action to reduce fossil fuel emissions before the impact on our planet is disastrous. While "Hibernation" is indeed a story of environmental crisis, it does not try to provide any answers to this looming problem or dip into hostility or condescension. Rather, it draws parallels to our world and speculates on how we would handle drastic necessities.

Butel exhibits passion and precision in his direction of this performance, which paired with swift movements from the cast and engaging digital elements captivates audiences, drawing their focus on the issues centred. Set design by Jonathon Oxlade is simple and sophisticated, consisting of a disk centred in a large screen allowing for projections to be utilised by video designer Matt Byrne who incorporates montaged visuals of both scenes of earth and reels of the actors. Lighting is used effectively by Gavin Norris to wash the stage with appropriate colours to assist the ambiance of the performance. Simple set pieces are utilised as both bars and beds, sites of cheerfulness and grief, providing levels that assist in making the production dynamic.

One of the strengths of the production was its international plotlines allowing further insight into the inequity of various nations as they prepare for and mourn the effects of hibernation on their cities, and their families.

Rashidi Edward and Kialea-Nadine Williams give strong and moving performances as Azubuike and Chidera Okoye, a couple from Lagos navigating the collapse of their environment and losing a son. The two have excellent chemistry in both scenes of grief, and humorous preparation in the before.

In South America, Ezra Juanta is incredibly charming as Ernesto Flores. Ernesto and his partner Luis, played by Chris Asimos, are wonderful to watch as they bicker over breakfast and care for Ernesto's mother, Cassandra. Cassandra is played by Rosalba Clemente, who's character development is a



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casualty of hibernation. Earlier on, Clemente plays the politically incorrect relative with appropriate humour; later in the play she delivers a melodramatic monologue of warning about our world and the water that aches to engulf us.

Each cast member playing a role set in Lagos and South America had excellent vocal control, with their voices commanding attention without overperforming. Each of them, and accent coach Jennifer Innes, should be commended.

Rather than presenting just the before and after of hibernation which Kruckemeyer originally intended, the play also shows us what occurs during. To achieve hibernation, an innovative gas drug known as 54E-501E is released, shutting down human function without harming the body, it simply pauses your functions to resume when you wake up. However, there are two characters that we meet who are not impacted by 54E-501E due to an advanced surgery they've had. These are Maggie, played by Elizabeth Hay, and Pete, played by James Smith. Hay and Smith deliver captivating performances that sell the dystopian elements of the story, as audiences' belief in the threat of wild dogs ruling the streets, insane numbers of birds roaming the skies and darker consequences of local areas going up in flames rely on their delivery. The local references are particularly effective in making the distinctive plot hit closer to home.

Poppy Kelly as the curious Jeong offers a naïve optimism to round out the production. Each scene is impactful and thought-provoking. For now, "Hibernation" is merely speculative fiction that addresses the sacrifices a desperate population must make in the name of a reset. Despite its heavy underlying themes, it's easy to enjoy the storylines unfold so long as you don't get stuck on the nitty gritty of the hibernation policy or some of the ethical considerations touched on in the play. "Hibernation" is bold and brilliant, and the State Theatre Company have tapped into a story that could not be more pressing.