



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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STAGE KISS

Galleon Theatre Group

Domain Theatre
Until 9 April 2022

Review by George Jankovic

Galleon Theatre Group has made a valiant attempt at tackling "Stage Kiss", a very funny, very clever piece from modern American playwright Sarah Ruhl.

Ruhl delights in taking a motif or idea as a specimen and using the theatre as an instrument to poke and prod it. In "Stage Kiss" the specimen is the art of theatre itself and the consequences of a life spent in it, where there is a very blurred line between one's professional and private lives.

A washed-up, out of work actress, played by Anita Zamberlan Canala, is cast in a play alongside her former lover played by Andrew Clark. The play-within-the-play – a laughably clichéd 1930s melodrama – sets the stage for Canala's character to question why they ever separated, and whether a life of domestic bliss with her now-husband is all it's cracked up to be. Canala and Clark share wonderful chemistry and play off each other perfectly. There is a side-splitting scene between them later in the play which, without giving too much away, involves a particularly dubious attempt at an Irish accent – all for the sake of art, of course.

"Stage Kiss" is a love-hate letter to the work of stagecraft. Those who have worked in the theatre will recognise the jumpy, fedora-wearing "Director" (Adrian Heness) all too well. He's the type that doesn't believe in rehearsal plans and calls for a break every five minutes, so confident is he in the sheer force of his own brilliance. The play is full of memorable lines and observations which hit like a flash of lightning: "My mother," Canala starts on the vanity of actors, "always told me not to marry someone who spends more time looking in the mirror than you do."

Heness plays his role a little too much like a caricature, and he's not the only one. Unfortunately, the heavy-handed direction misses the fact that the characters, with their hopes and dreams, are not objects of ire, but of sympathy. There are laughs, but the overacting clouds some of the script's thoughtful, quiet moments. Some scenes – especially one where Canala's character is paid a visit from her family – are played dangerously close to the sort of melodrama Ruhl is lampooning.

The mousy understudy, played by Anthony Vawser in a nuanced performance, is the comic gel of every scene he's in. The set design, based on a concept by Brittany Daw, utilizes the space effectively for the setting of both acts. There were some projection issues from the entire cast, especially when laughter drowned out the dialogue.

"Stage Kiss" is a very clever play, and some of that cleverness is sadly missing from this production. But it was still a pleasure for some wonderful performances, and for the sheer brilliance of Ruhl's writing itself.