

THE UNEXPECTED MAN

Directors' Choice '05

Holden Street Theatres

Until April 30

Review by Stephanie Johnson

Intimacy is the gem at the centre of this unexpected treasure – “The Unexpected Man”.

Two strangers travel in the intimacy of a train compartment. Slowly and gently a story evolves as the man and the woman reveal their most intimate thoughts about their relationships, hopes, dreams, disappointments and loss. Cleverly intertwined is the growing awareness of each other in the train compartment.

Morag Cook's set is stunning in its simplicity. Cook uses two see-through, mirror-sided panes of glass on each side of the stage, creating a train compartment enabling the audience to see the actors clearly, as well as their reflections.

Train travel is often used, to varying degrees of effectiveness, to symbolize life's journey and to create a moment in time. It is a superb setting for this play, giving it an edge that encourages both a delight in the journey as well as the anticipation of the destination.

Playwright Yasmina Reza has set this trip from Paris to Frankfurt giving this play a European flavour. However, the two flawed and fragile characters could be anywhere.

Rob MacPherson plays the man Peter Parsky, with finesse. He cleverly portrays an embittered novelist who inwardly snaps and snarls at himself in the reflection of the train window while somehow conveying a calm exterior. MacPherson is brilliant as he slowly scrapes away the cold shell of bitterness to reveal the warm vulnerability that lies within this troubled author. An uneasy character is made human and the yearning for redemption is palpable.

Carolyn Mignone is a capable Martha, the woman who finds she is sitting opposite a much-admired author. Mignone portrays Martha's intelligence and fragility with sweetness that is a perfect foil to her compatriot. Her outward hand wringing is nicely juxtaposed to the man's inner turmoil.

Director Michael Hill has created a wonderful production that strips any excess and leaves the complexity of the script and the characters to fully shine in this simple but powerful play.

The intimate setting of the Holden Street Theatre is the ideal venue for this production and lighting designer Nic Mollison also deserves a mention. It's no wonder the season has been extended.