



Adelaide Theatre Guide

www.theatreguide.com.au

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

PRICE CHECK! – A NEW MUSICAL

La Bohème

Until 2 June

Review by Maggie Wood

“Price Check – A New Musical” is a curious animal. This is a performed reading of a new show, so essentially the project is still in development.

One of the creators, Sean Weatherly, who also was one of the actors participating in the read, was quite transparent from the start in seeking the audience’s feedback on what they did and did not like in the production in order to better it. Kudos to him for putting it out there and there is admittedly some key work to be done.

For these reasons this review needs to be done in two parts, so first will be the review of the actors participating, and secondly the review of the piece itself.

As far as the cast goes, with Don Bridges as Mr Butler, Jacqy Philips as Mrs Zimmerman, Catherine Campbell as Narelle Sims and Fahad Farooque as Zayeeb Dash we have four actors who manage to squeeze every inch out of their characters and bring them to life with gusto. The fifth of the cast, Sean Weatherly seems a little more restrained, perhaps feeling caught between his involvement as actor and that of creator, and his character of David seemed to be very much more subdued and less definitive.

Music is supplied expertly and almost invisibly by the supremely talented Peter Johns.

As far as the work itself goes, yes it still does need development.

There is much emphasis on the trivia of life as a supermarket employee and a decision needs to be made about how to play that. Played straight, as it is currently, it falls flat.

Moments of drama are sometimes indistinguishable from moments of comedy, for example when the elderly lady collapses and dies and the main focus is the argument between Mr Butler and David about what to do with her. If that’s not played as high comedy then it is deeply tragic and it strays into the ‘cringe comedy’ area of “The Office” and its ilk.

The music is certainly not off-the-peg Broadway brand, and it would be interesting to hear it played by a full band or orchestra.

If the minutiae of supermarket life are the focus of the piece then the comedy needs to be camped up – especially if it is to match the dance sequences (which were described to the audience rather than performed). The folly of these details directing people’s lives remains rather uninteresting without some higher story arc. We don’t know what the characters stand for, why they do what they do. We don’t know their back stories, their hopes or their dreams.

And that is really the key missing ingredient from this show – it has no real heart. We don’t know enough about the characters to care about them. Why would a seemingly happily partnered family man decide to lead a single colleague on, romantically? We never find out; why does someone stay 15 years in a job despite events showing them the fragility of life and the impermanence with which we all live?



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We don't know; why does someone move halfway across the world to nurse fruit and veg? Again we are not told; and why is someone with the creative soul of a dancer such a horrible person to work with? Who knows? We don't have enough of their stories to understand them, identify with them or care about what happens to them.

Unfortunately that leads to one of the cardinal sins against musical theatre – the audience members do not leave feeling better than we did when we came in. Instead we have a lot of unanswered questions.

This is a piece of work that is not without merit. The use of the Australian 'voice' in accent and syntax is wonderful, the potential of using the supermarket as the 'stage' upon which we play out our lives is endless, and the quality of the cast this reading attracted surely shows that there is faith in the production team.

As long as open minds continue to develop the show with more of an eye on the needs of the audience, then we may look forward in time to wonderful new Australian musical.