

British Theatre Guide

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Bubba and Luvvie

Angus Strachan

Big Tex Productions

King's Head Theatre

(2010)

This play and its production (for which the author is responsible) irritated me intensely but, by the time it reached its conclusion, had begun to win me over. It begins with the sound of heavy surf and an overlong projected sequence shot as though in the water, then presents us with a park bench with a moon reflected in water behind it. A blonde woman, wearing sunglasses in the middle of the night, is accosted by what at first appears to be a stranger. That's all fine, except that the dialogue says we are on a cliff top with a steep, deep drop in front of the bench. Yet shortly, from this suicide cliff, the woman can lean down and pick things straight out of the water.

Confusing? You're telling me! Could the author/director be trying to deliberately make it difficult to work out what is going on? He does not need to. It is quite effort enough sorting out the ever changing back history possibilities between his two characters as they endlessly confront each other.

The idea is probably to be surreal but that takes more than a lack of logic, a big moon and a plethora of changing lighting states and Belle Mundi's projections (including a rather attractive shower of fishes). Although the dialogue appears to be a continuous conversation in real time, some of these changes seem to indicate a passage of time, as though the problems between the two people have been longstanding, while others, like turning things to red when violence is mentioned are a response to the dialogue, but often they are at the expense of seeing the actors' faces

The performers face a considerable challenge in handling this difficult material but Gerard McDermott as the hip-flask toting, wife-cheating worn-out copper and Mia Soteriou as the blonde tart who then reveals herself as a much older life-worn woman give them tremendous energy, despite a script that makes them behave as complete strangers for a good half of the play. There are moments, especially towards the end, when these people really come alive but, though much of the time the characters quite rightly seem uncertain what is going on, there were moments when I felt the actors didn't know either as they spill out tales of patricide and shootings!

Writer Strachan clearly has a love of words and his dialogue has a dose of the Dylans without being gratingly poetical but is it really necessary for director Strachan to project key words repetitively on the backing? To hammer some points home when lack of clarity seems a deliberate feature of the exercise seems contradictory, or is it just to compound the confusion? He chose to have almost all props mimed with a performance style that blurred the difference between them being real or just the characters playing let's pretend - not holding a gun with finger on the trigger for instance but pointing a finger as a pistol. Though overdone it adds a comic element but this production already has too many gimmicks.

This play apparently began as a 20-minute piece Strachan created as a drama student back in Sydney and has been developed over time into 50-minute and now a 90 minute piece. The layered complexity of the storytelling is like a detective drama leading to an Agatha Christie-like unexpected clarification but there are times when its confusion loses rather than hold attention. At 100 minutes without an interval there is more than one point when it seems too long. Moments of boredom (or exasperation) aside, it needs not slashing but more, a fuller and deeper exploration of this intriguing relationship - with some hiatus to provide an interval to give both audience and cast a rest from its intensity.

Perhaps Strachan is just too close to his material and he should risk putting it into other hands to bring the best out of this play with its cliff edge setting a metaphor for the characters' life situation, the exploration of which is analogous to the misunderstandings, suspicions, apportioning of blame and sheer blindness that are sadly true of the majority of couples.

Runs until 8th August 2010

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)