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The Last Bordello

David Leddy

Fire Exit

Traverse Theatre

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The play begins with Irma (Vari Sylvester) welcoming Mitri (David Rankine) into a brothel, which is, it seems, somewhere in Palaestine. Mitri wants to lose his virginity to prove he is a man to his brother.

However, it is the brothel's final night, with the bulldozers arriving in the morning. Mitri gets a lot more than he bargained for.

Like a naughty version of Conor McPherson's *The Weir*, each of the brothel staff has a different tale to tell.

It soon becomes clear that, like the wrappings around the furniture, this is a transparent homage to the Jean Genet.

The Maids is a key reference, but also *No Exit* by Genet's great champion Sartre. Two plays which are already over-exposed in dull revivals.

Becky Minto's monochrome design with furniture absorbed into the walls adds to the weird atmosphere. There are some great simple set changes, use of curtains, the Mettray sequence with grey cloth and the ending.

Ably assisted by Nick Smith's lighting, adding to the surreal feel particularly during Irma's speech about Genet's early life, Sylvester delivers a wonderful impassioned monologue as Irma, explaining Genet's time in a Barcelona brothel, as the lighting teleports you back.

Indeed the light the play shines on Genet's life, especially his politics, is perhaps more interesting than the mimicking of Genet's plays.

Virtue (Apphia Campbell) starts speaking of his involvement with the Black Panthers, but is interrupted, leaving you wanting to learn more.

As in [Love Song To Lavender Menace](#), Matthew McVarish continues to be a great exponent of camp, with his character Fassbinder providing the brothel with male talent and plenty of sass.

There is perhaps an expectation of debauchery in the brothel that never quite materialises. There is some male on male action, but nothing really shocking.

If you are really intent on showing horror and explicit sexual scenes on stage, why shy away from showing any male genitalia for instance.

The cast though certainly exude plenty of danger and sexual energy, with Madame (Irene Allan) attempting to lead, but being subverted by the various whores already mentioned and Darling (Helen McAlpine).

Rankine is very watchable throughout as the Palestinian wannabe freedom fighter out of his depth, a touching antidote to the more outrageous other characters.

The production has a great visual ending, but it rather loses its way before that. Plenty of potential for the future, with avenues like Genet's involvement with the Black Panthers to go down.

Reviewer: [Seth Ewin](#)