

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

PERIDOT – A SEASON OF ONE ACT PLAYS

Reviewed by Cate Dowling-
Trask,
3 Jun 2022

ONE ACT PLAY SEASON

Peridot Theatre

"Line Up" by Steven Berkoff. Directed by Joe Dias.

"Embers" by Natalie Burns. Directed by Colin Morley.

"Love is a Dish" by Adele Shelley. Directed by Audrey Farthing

"Just a Straight Man" by Rob Smith and John Mawson. Directed by Bob Bramble

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Performed in a new venue, the Clayton Community Centre Theatre, Peridot Theatre presented their 2022 One Act Play season. The evening's four plays were eclectic in style and theme, offering two dramas and two comedies that ranged between an emotionally charged piece of modern history and a farcical two-hander set in a restaurant.

Directed by Colin Morley, 'Embers', by local playwright Natalie Burns, features a large all-women cast. It is an allegorical take on the New Year's Day conflagration that engulfed south-eastern Australia in 2019. The characters' names represent towns consumed by firestorms. Conflict occurs when a young, ambitious journalist, a former local, arrives to report on the impending disaster. Her appearance, after years' absence, is resented by her estranged friends and family. Gemma Tripp as Nowra the reporter effectively delivered her "pieces to camera," but was less convincing in the personal scenes. I noted the performances of Meg Davies

as Bay and Sarah Tierney as Corry, with Jane Carter, Carlotta Migliolo and Deborah Gaskin completing the cast. The simple staging involved the cast remaining on stage and using a mix of chairs choreographed to form the settings. Anticipation of the descending doom inherent in the script was, at times, laboured and repetitive but, overall, the play maintained its pace and interest.

'Love is a Dish', by Adele Shelley, was directed by Audrey Farthing. Set in Tally's restaurant, we met Beaux (Gavin Baker) her lover, and Tally (Summer Bowen) chef extraordinaire. Tally had some exciting news for Beaux as they met to celebrate their fifth year together, while Beaux had news of his own. The script indulges in foodie exclamations like "dangling donuts," and much physical comedy. Both performers appeared to be enjoying their banter as they lurched from one revelation to the next. The play, more complex than many one-acters, required practical food which was wolfed down between dialogue. The restaurant setting of dining table, serving table and screen worked well. This piece, the final play of the evening, was met with laughs and giggles from an appreciative audience.

With Michael Moore as Trevor and Martyn Jones as Barney, 'Just a Straight Man' is a dressing-room comedy by Rob Smith and John Mawson which opened the second act. As a successful comic duo, Barney and Trevor were in conflict and a break-up was imminent. The storyline headed into threatening territory as their "creative differences" boiled over. Bob Bramble's direction, drawing on his own comedy experience, made the most of the script. The props and setting worked to provide the contrast between the characters. I quickly recognised the coming twist in the storyline but enjoyed the reveal. Both performers gave most assured performances in their very distinct roles, which delivered many laughs.

The first play on the bill was authored by noted British actor/director/playwright/polymath Steven Berkoff. 'Line Up' told of a brief friendship born by chance in the most horrific of circumstances. Directed with empathy and precision by Joe Dias, the play opened with a series of huge projections including "In war, between chaos and peace, there is a chance" and heart-rending photos from the Holocaust. Two men, played with authenticity by Peter Tedford-Taylor and Gilbert Gauci, have stepped from a cattle-car train at the gates of a concentration camp. Over the

course of a few minutes, as they lined up for “selection” by the camp guards, we heard about their lives, the tragedies they have suffered, and their recognition of what awaits them. Our knowledge of their ultimate future added to the drama. Samantha Foo and Joe Dias designed the soundscape for the play. This play was a small gem, and Joe Dias’ professional direction gave it the gravitas it truly deserved.

Gail Brackley was Stage Manager and props person, with lighting operation by Karim Ghantous, and sound operation by Kate Deavin for all four plays. The changes from one play to the next were completed quickly and quietly, which can be a challenge.

With Peridot having so recently relocated from its long-time former home, and the risks of Covid-related disruptions, it was gratifying to see an enthusiastic audience out on a winter’s night.