

# reviews



(l-r) *Faustine Werts, Aurélie Casrouge, Michael Bula, Karim Bouriah-Lopez, Anna Vranes and Ludivine Siret in Melbourne French Theatre Company's George Dandin—The Frustrated Husband. Photo by Ilaria O'Brien.*

## GEORGE DANDIN—THE FRUSTRATED HUSBAND

by Moliere

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Christopher Hosking

Reviewed by Hayley Lawson-Smith – September 6, 2014

French culture is alive and well as Melbourne French Theatre brings to us the tragically comic tale of *George Dandin*, a self-made man who marries into aristocracy and regrets it. Poor George cannot catch a break; his wife believes she's entitled to affairs, his in-laws think the sun shines out of their daughter's every orifice, the servants are against him and, to top it all off, the man seducing George's wife is annoyingly handsome.

It takes an actor with energy and skill to pull off such a role as *George Dandin*. In casting *Faustine Werts*, director *Christopher Hosking* has found his man... or rather, woman. *Faustine* gives a fantastically convincing performance. Although her enigmatic Parisian laugh was sometimes a little overused, the audience were charmed by her, felt sorry for her, and cheered her on, wanting *George* to overcome his trials. There was barely a moment when *Faustine* was not on stage; she used every minute she had to successfully present to us the arc of her character's development.

It was a tiny space for her to do so. This pop-up theatre in Carlton gave the actors little room to move and the audience were up close and personal to say the least. However, with a bit of clever directing, the space was used effectively and, as the narration was delivered directly to the audience with *George Dandin* in particular weaving in and out of the cosy seating, the room itself became the stage. The set was aesthetically pleasing in blacks and whites, the only bit of

colour being a projection of scenery onto a flat that also doubled as a window. Unfortunately this flat was put far too forward on the stage and inhibited the view of a good many audience members. One woman in the front row went so far as to push the set to the side with her foot, a move I could hardly blame her for. There was one door for the actors to enter and exit through. This did nothing to restrict the storyline; however, it hung from the set in such a way that it would rotate as the actors passed through and often got stuck. This caused a flurry of stagehands' hands to appear from above and from the sides to fix it. Very distracting and unnecessary, as this is something the actors could have done while in character.

Through this hazard-prone door stepped our many actors. *Michael Bula* as *Monsieur de Sotenville*, and *Aurélie Casrouge* as *Madame de Sotenville* were delightful. They brought to mind *Les Misérables'* hideously glorious couple the *Thénardiens*, had they ever been invited to court. *Michael* and *Aurélie*, working seamlessly together, were a real treat to watch.

*Anna Vranes* as *Angélique*, was overbearing and scrumptiously wicked, although you had to wonder what her lover, *Clitandre*, could see in her despite her beauty. *Clitandre*, played by *Karim Bouriah-Lopez*, had the charm of a pirate and *Karim* performed his part well. He was a subtle, yet convincing rogue.

*Robin Brugerolle* as *Lubin*, was fantastically comic. His clownish behaviour ran the risk of being overdone at times, but he pulled off the foolish servant with great aplomb.

*Ludivine Siret* as *Claudine* was another pleasure to watch. Obviously delighting in her troublemaking character, *Ludivine* gave a wonderful impression of a devilish servant. I would suggest, however, that she be careful with her projection. Even in such an intimate space, all the actors needed to make sure their voices

carried to the back of the room. Some of their beautiful French was lost.

Yes, the play is performed entirely in French, but the surtitles to the side of the stage were timed well. If you don't mind reading and watching you shouldn't have any problems following the story.

*George Dandin—The Frustrated Husband*, presented in the style of commedia dell'arte with traditional make-up, was a theatrical joy and a great experience. It certainly whets the appetite for more French theatre.

Merci beaucoup!