

## ABSENT FRIENDS (MARIAGES ET CONSÉQUENCES)

by Sir Alan Ayckbourn

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Matthew O'Sullivan

Reviewed By Deborah Fabbro – August 27, 2011

*Mariages et Conséquences* is the French version of Sir Alan Ayckbourn's 1974 play, *Absent Friends*. It was translated into French by Claire Nadeau in 1999 and played a season in Paris.

I have now seen this play three times, twice in English and this current production in French, and I'm yet to be totally convinced that it is as good as some of Ayckbourn's other works. That said there was much about the MFT production that commended the play to me more than previous productions.

Clément, Paul, Jean and Georges have been friends for a long time. When Clément loses his fiancée, who none of the others have met, in a tragic drowning accident two months earlier, Paul's wife, Danièle, thinks it would be nice if they all meet for afternoon tea to show their sympathy and support. Georges is ill, as he often is, but his wife Marianne still attends as does Jean's wife, Evelyne. A nice idea if there were not all sorts of undercurrents in their various relationships.

Sonia Davoine, as the uptight insecure Danièle, gave a solid performance and moved well from the bright hostess, masking her unhappiness caused by her philandering husband — he has had a brief encounter in the back of a car with Jean's wife, Evelyne — through to the moment when she snaps and breaks down obsessing that she should have joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police instead of marrying Paul. This scene was very well handled. In only his second appearance on stage, Yves Bessard portrayed Paul, her philandering husband, and while we saw glimpses of the character's selfishness and self-obsession this could have been stronger. Still, I look forward to seeing this actor in future productions.

Another relative newcomer, Izabel Henri showed her potential in her depiction of the put-upon but ever cheerful Marianne, as she took telephone calls from her husband Georges who even when he is laid up in bed still manages to be accident prone. A little more attention to timing in these scenes from the entire cast would have added to the audience's appreciation.

Left: (l-r) Izabel Henri and Yves Bessard in Melbourne French Theatre's *Absent Friends* (*Mariages et Conséquences*).



Right: (l-r) Victoire Mazounie and Yoann Vidor in *Absent Friends*. Photos by Micheal Bula.

We got a good sense of the antipathy between Evelyne and Jean. Victoire Mazounie was wonderfully sullen when delivering her response (usually "no") to any question asked of her, and her flat deadpan reading of the article from her magazine "How to make your man happy" was delivered so well. The sense of boredom did not always continue when she was just sitting in her chair and not actually part of the action. Geoffrey Denans kept up the mannerisms of the hyperactive Jean quite well.

The play belongs to Clément as he prattles on unaware of the discontent in his friends' lives and their growing realization of difference between the rosy pictures he paints of them, and the reality. Yoann Vidor managed the fine balance of keeping his character affable and full of good cheer, despite his loss, without allowing him to become foolish or idiotic.

The representational set of the living room of Paul and Danièle's home was functional and gave the actors a good space to work in, though there were a few awkward moves around the sofa. Lighting and sound were appropriate, though I was not aware of the baby crying that I recalled from other productions of this play.

I always enjoy the warmth and the personal welcome by Producer, Michael Bula, which MFT extends to its audiences. They should be proud of their 80<sup>th</sup> production and I look forward to their future productions.