

LA DOUBLE INCONSTANCE (DOUBLE INFIDELITY)

By Pierre de Marivaux

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Paul Terrell

Reviewed by Bruce Cochrane – May 10, 2013

In its 36th year Melbourne French Theatre continues to be an important part of Melbourne's theatre scene, catering as it does for the local French community as well as those with an interest in French culture and particularly French theatre. It was pleasing then at the end of the show to have the French Ambassador to Australia announce that the French Government had agreed to resume funding to MFT and to endorse the charter and value of the theatre's activities.

For its 83rd production the company presented a contemporary interpretation of an early 18th-Century play which, while classified as a comedy, was more an elegiac poem about the troubles that come with being entwined with the wrong person. Working in a minimalist setting that was intended to represent a royal court, and with nondescript period costume, the production was limited visually and also stylistically due to an inconsistency of acting style. With a simple plot and basic dialogue, tone becomes more crucial, and in this case it ranged from exaggerated and dramatic to a farcical style playing out to the audience rather than to another character.

Only Agathe Loup as Flaminia appeared to be completely confident about the style of acting involved as she captured the essence of self-mockery required and combined it with deft stagecraft. Her gestures and facial expressions were not overdone but were a delight to watch and evoked real humour. In the role of Arlequin, Henry Mera was entirely credible as a man who is for most of the play in a melancholy state after seeing his love Silvia 'kidnapped' by the prince, but had little scope for comedy. Likewise Damien Kenny, who presents impressively, was restricted by mawkishly sentimental lines and seemed not to share much chemistry with the object of his affection, Silvia, played by Charlotte Chapman. Charlotte had the task of making repetitious declarations about the injustice of being conflicted in her affections for the man who, unbeknown to her, is the prince, and in her loyalty to Arlequin. At times Charlotte introduced inexplicable pauses in her lines which also do not help to develop comedy such as this is, and suggest a state of mind which was not apparent. Fabrice Castain, in his second stage appearance, played Trivelin, a courtier and, although a bit subdued, has the appearance and composure to make something of a character in a more substantial piece.

At the other end of the scale two characters made an impact with their appearances to the extent of being caricatures. Julie David as Lisette, a coquettish young woman, looked the part while overdoing body language and movement including excessive use of a fan. Sometimes in comedy less is more and when the maestro Michel Bula made his grand entrance as a lord of the court he needed a strong hand to have held him back. Fully in command of his words and gestures, Michel played more to the audience than to other characters with a form of comedy that was not embraced by the rest of the cast. And so while 'Marivaudage' (the style of writing which was a mixture of sentimentality and trivialities) may have been preserved, the charm of the period was lost in inconsistency and strained emotions.

Greg Abendroth achieved some effective lighting effects but the bizarre use of music that intruded on dialogue was a mistake. The handsome programme revealed productive efforts from the sponsorship department with an extensive network of supporters.



(l-r) Julie David, Damien Kenny, Charlotte Chapman and Agathe Loup in Melbourne French Theatre's *La Double Inconstance* (Double Infidelity) Photo by Jessica Valls.