

## CHER TRÉSOR

By Francis Veber

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Judith Turnbull

Review by David Collins – May 10, 2014

So, a disclaimer of sorts: I don't speak French. I don't know my *liaisons* from my *enchaînement*. Sure, I'll grab you by the lapels and won't let go until you understand that *Le Hérisson* or *Il Y A Longtemps Que Je T'aime* are some of the most heartbreakingly beautiful stories committed to film—but, besides movies, my contact with the language and culture itself extends no further than 'Allo 'Allo and the odd French-printing of Asterix mistakenly borrowed from the library.

Written by Francis Veber, *Cher Trésor* tells the story of down-on-his-luck Pignon (Nathanaël Francisco). Unemployed, left by his wife, pitied by his friends, the only thing Pignon has going for him is



Above: (l-r) Noemie Clain and Nathanaël Francisco in Melbourne French Theatre's *Cher Trésor*.

Below: (l-r) Nathanaël Francisco and Florian Costé in *Cher Trésor*. Photos by Michael Bula.



housesitting at his godfather's mansion. But a roof over his head isn't enough to stop Pignon feeling like the bad seed of his family. After a run-in with the taxman, he commits to stop a further slide into obscurity and conspires to make himself the target of a pretend audit. Sure enough, thinking he's sitting on a secret cache of money, Pignon's friends and ex-wife come running back. However, this new Pignon is never more than an empty façade (admittedly a realisation come to after having slept with his godfather's interior decorator). Following some unexpected calamities making him the persistent object of people's attention, Pignon begins to see the merits in having a little obscurity in his life.

I realised I was never going to be laughing as hard as the Francophiles in the audience, but thanks to projected surtitles translated by producer, Michael Bula, there were plenty of laughs for non-French speakers to be had as well.

What is often lost in translation to English is the sense of voice, that individual way a character speaks and chooses his words that communicates so much about themselves to an audience. Director Judith Turnbull has clearly worked with the cast in communicating their characters through their physicality as well as in the text. Francisco's shoulders rarely lifted above a stoop in his excellent portrayal as the downtrodden Pignon. While there were moments his morose delivery was too quiet, his posture and movements spoke to his character nicely.

After a languid opening scene between Pignon and friend, Maurin (played well by Fabrice Chatain), a welcomed change-up in energy came with the entrance of Marie Besse playing Pignon's ex-wife, Marie. While the occasional late cue slowed some scenes down, Besse gave her scenes much-needed vigour.

While the storytelling was relaxed, it doesn't mean the script wasn't a shallow one. By the end, when Pignon's godfather Jonville (played in stoic fashion by Florian Costé) appears, Veber does this wonderful sleight-of-hand with the text. The audience realises that despite everything, the real bad seed of the family is Jonville, not Pignon. It's a lovely touch of depth to an otherwise harmless-but-hilarious comedy.

On a warmly lit set—featuring interactive Marilyn Monroe artwork complete with billowing white dress, along with other 'art'—received warmly by the audience, this final performance of *Cher Trésor* by Melbourne French Theatre wasn't without a hiccup or two, but was absolutely full of heart.