



"On Purge Bébé"  
Melbourne French  
Theatre's recent  
production.

## ON PURGE BÉBÉ (BABY TO THE POT)

by Georges Feydeau

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Michael Bula

Reviewed by Ken Barnes - 1 September 2006

*On Purge Bébé* has to do with porcelain manufacturer Follavoine's attempts to sell chamber pots to the Ministry of Defence for use by soldiers in the French Army. His distraught wife Julie is having problems of her own: the baby refuses to take a purgative. When Ministry representative Adhéaume Chouilloux arrives to check out the goods he becomes entangled in the family crisis. Further mayhem ensues when Madam Chouilloux turns up with her lover, Horace. The play was written in 1910 and while this kind of absurd comedy might not appeal to Victorian tastes, it still strikes a chord with audiences who appreciate sophisticated French farce with a twist of lemon.

*Bébé* was performed at The Open Stage in Parkville, which ensured more than adequate facilities for this type of play. The actors were at floor level below tiered seating, English sub-titles on a screen immediately above the set which meant that those of us who are linguistically challenged had no difficulty following the lines. The set itself was both tasteful and appropriate to the period. Lighting and sound were similarly proficient in planning and execution and I was particularly impressed with the authentic belle époque costumes. Before the performance and at interval, pianist A. David Gorrie played short pieces by Erik Satie - a nice touch of class and also appropriate to the period.

Casting could not have been better. Aurélien Mondon played the role of the self-delusional Follavoine with great finesse, his effervescent portrayal capturing the mercurial character perfectly. Aurélie Gachet was equally exuberant and delightfully provocative as Julie, the two actors conveying the frenetic domestic interaction with subtle expressions and body language. Eddy Fatha who brought out the quirky, civil servant preciousness of Adhéaume Chouilloux with great flair and imagination played the third key role.

Maïva Veerapen played the somewhat less demanding role of Rose, the maid. Her lilting voice was a delight and her flourishes and fluttering footsteps a treat to watch. Also proficient were supporting actors Janaina Dal Zotto Boff as elegant Madam Chouilloux, and Michael Bula as the dastardly Horace. A very special mention goes to Heidi Bula who played the baby with great finesse. This young lady has an excellent stage presence even at her age and we hope to see more of her in the future.

This entertaining play was documented in excellent program notes and made all the more enjoyable by the friendly atmosphere in the foyer. Melbourne is fortunate to have a specialised company able to bring us French theatre with such an array of talent and technical competence. We can only hope that this group of enthusiasts will continue to enjoy support from theatregoers.