

THE DINNER GAME (LE DINER DE CONS)

By Francis Veber

Melbourne French Theatre Inc

Directed by Morgan Dowsett

Reviewed by Jill Watson – Saturday 27 May 2006 (matinee)

The play was performed entirely in French (extremely rapid!) with English sub-titles! The venue was the Ballroom of the Collingwood Town Hall and was a little too large, with very "bouncing" acoustics. They had a record attendance for a matinee of just under 300 (mostly students), all very attentive. It was good to hear the traditional French 3 knocks before the beginning of the play.

A film was adapted by Veber in 1998 from the original long-running 1993 play. The main character is the bumbling Monsieur François Pignon, and I see from program notes that Veber has used this character again in a recently released film "La Doublure".

The work is not a true farce, as what happens is all too possible. It does, however, have fast action, situations running out of control and mistaken identity (only one!!). The set (the living room of Pierre Brochant, a publisher) suggested a reasonably well-off Paris residence. No "walls", so three paintings were put on easels upstage – two nudes and some rude looking fruit – probably peaches! Settee centre stage, drinks trolley stage right, table and 'phone stage left. The 'phone played an important part and since no time was given for the action, I wonder if a cordless 'phone would have been better – the very long lead across the stage to the settee looked messy and the plug came out at one point. The sub-titles were at the top of the proscenium arch and although well done, were rather dark and difficult to read, and I



Scenes from Melbourne French Theatre's "Le Diner De Cons"

ADJUDICATORS COURSE

The Victorian Drama League are calling for expressions of interest from anyone interested in attending an Adjudicator's Course in July. We have been very fortunate in securing the talent and expertise of Lisle Jones as our tutor for the course, who comes to us highly credentialed with a prestigious career in theatre. Lisle was born in Melbourne and began his career in 1945 where he was active in theatre and radio. He toured Australia with the Royal Shakespeare Co and then moved to England in 1958 where he acted and directed for 24 years. He adjudicated with the Drama Guild of Adjudicators and he ran the drama departments of prestigious Arts Educational Schools before returning to Australia in 1982 to join the staff of the newly created Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). He was Head of Theatre until he retired in 1995.

The course will take place on Saturday July 1 and Saturday July 8 from 10am to 4pm at Ross House, Flinders Lane, Melbourne. In addition, students will attend the performance of a play on Wednesday July 5 to enable them to use their newly acquired knowledge to prepare an adjudicators report for discussion with the group at the second session. The course will cover such subjects as :

- The purpose of adjudicating
- What form does an adjudication take
- What criteria do we look at
- Breaking down the elements of the production
- Types of plays • Staging – strengths and weaknesses
- Elements of performance • Marking

The cost of the course is just \$90 which includes the two weekend sessions, attending the performance of a play, course notes, morning and afternoon tea and a light lunch. Spaces will be limited so please register your interest as soon as possible with Vicki Smith on 0419 329 052 or to vsmith@macarthurcook.com.au.

was sitting in the front row. I was not alone with this problem. In the second act, the sub-titles stopped for a while, then were rushed forward to catch up!

The plot is complicated. A group of men meet regularly for dinner and take it in turns to invite someone to join them, who unwittingly becomes the butt of their jokes and sarcasm – an idiot, in other words. Brochant's wife is fed up with these dinners and leaves Brochant. The latest idiot, Pignon, turns up early and "helps" Brochant (who has just done his back in) to find the wife. A series of calls by Pignon cause havoc, he brings in a colleague at the Audit Office (Lucien Cheval – a joke with his name, of course, which means 'horse') to help locate a person the wife is believed to be with. Cheval sees that Brochant has valuable things hidden away and intends to look into his file. And so it goes. The wife nearly returns but a last minute boo boo by Pignon turns it all around again.

The acting throughout was top class – really professional. The stage was used well (director Morgan take a bow) and everyone looked very confident. Eddy K Fatha as Pignon was wonderful – his short physique suited the part and he managed to convey an essential innocence and goodness, despite being a twit. Bruno Gutton as Pierre Brochant, moaning and groaning with his bad back, totally self-absorbed, was also excellent and kept the pace going. His wife Christine, played by Judith Dallez, looked very much the bored, cold Parisienne, but I found her delivery a little too deadpan – not enough light and shade. Michael Bula as Dr Archambaud has great stage presence and clear delivery. Chloe Brugale as Mariène, Brochant's mistress, was suitably emotional, dizzy and dumb. Jean-François Delvaen as Juste Leblanc, Brochant's friend despite the fact that Brochant stole Christine away from Juste, brought warmth to the part. Juste quietly and without malice put Brochant back in his box. Clifford Edouard as Lucien Cheval looked suitably manic and received plenty of laughs.

I really enjoyed this production and congratulate all concerned.