

LUNES DE MIEL

by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Based on *Private Lives* by Noël Coward

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Alec Gilbert

Reviewed by Michael Bond – May 5, 2016

Attending a performance of a play in French can pose a number of difficulties for an audience member with only a smattering of French. Fortunately, this problem was largely overcome through the supply of surtitles—although complications can occur when either the actors skip pages or the surtitle mechanism breaks down. The frozen surtitle screen, or the surtitles changing rapidly as the operator tries to catch up with the actors, can provide an unwelcome distraction.

Lunes de Miel follows the plot of Noël Coward's *Private Lives*, where a divorced couple runs into each other while they are on their respective honeymoons with their new partners. The well-known plot was very easy to follow and the action was fast-paced. Modern references within the script and 21st-Century implements worked well to update the production for a contemporary audience.

The director, Alec Gilbert, developed a more naturalistic style of performance than one would expect from a "typical" Coward play and this worked very well in the performance, not losing any of the original's comedic moments. The action flowed very well, with the actors generally presenting relaxed, believable characters, working smoothly within well blocked and choreographed scenes. In general, the performance had the energy required to create the comedy of the play, but there were times when this was due to the comedy of the play rather than the energy of the actors.

Ophélie Stroumza in her role of Sybille played the youthfulness and immaturity of her character with confidence and control. Her physicality helped define her character more fully and this, coupled with believable ranges of emotion, pace and expression, helped create a strong performance.

In his role of Eliot, William Simpson tended to be a little restricted in his movements and spent a majority of his time addressing the audience or peering towards the back of the theatre. There were also times when his delivery was too quick and his expression was lacking. Fortunately these shortcomings did tend to become less evident in the second and third acts.

Marguerite Milh as Amanda presented her character in a confident, believable manner. Her ranges of emotion and her interaction with the other characters showed variety and an understanding of the requirements of her interpretation. Her work in the scenes with Eliot worked particularly well.



William Simpson and Ophélie Stroumza in Melbourne French Theatre's *Lunes de Miel*. Photo by Jean-Philippe Héon.

James Simpson played the part of Victor with an understanding of his character and its role within the play. He worked well vocally and physically, displaying the genuineness of his character with subtlety. When Victor finally snaps at Sybille in the final moments of the play, he is able to maintain the truth of his character in his interpretation.

In this adaptation, the role of the maid, Louise, has much less stage time than in *Private Lives*. In her brief appearances, Sheila Fullee looked to be at ease physically, but her diction made it difficult to decide whether she was speaking French or a derivation of it as was indicated by the surtitles.

Phil Holmes developed a symbolic, adaptable set that was suitable for the performance space. Perhaps the set for Act One could have been a little wider to give the actors more space, but they managed well without it.

The lighting covered the space quite well and used some interesting effects to add body to the overall wash. The costumes were well thought-out and were appropriate to the characters and style of the production.

This was an enjoyable production and was appreciated by the audience.

Vive la difference et vive le Théâtre Français de Melbourne.