

other characters, whose portrayals are shared between them, but we always find ourselves coming back to Charlie and Jake. The switching characters may occasionally have got a bit muddled in the transitions, but Brian and Rogier gave excellent performances.

Les Hart's set was lovely, a fieldstone wall cutting its way across a green field, with a rambling curve of smaller stones along the front of the stage. There was a strong sense of place, while also allowing the actors to play and take us where they had to.

The show was not without its clutter, be it strewn clothes, hats and other pieces lying around or being released from the ceiling. There is also a video camera on a tripod broadcasting live whatever it is pointed at, getting carted about the place. For the most part, this bustle of the staging worked, as it aligned itself with the bustle of the story: an idyllic Irish town wrung out and wrecked by the presence and behaviour of a Hollywood film production.

However, the most effective moments remained those simply staged: conversations amid the hijinks between Charlie and Jack were always a delight; Jack receiving Brother Gerard's counsel in his struggle to understand Sean's suicide was a beautiful scene; the hyper-threats from a hyper-Scottish security guard, Jock, were hilarious; while the lack of respect afforded Mickey as he's removed from the 'set', i.e. his home, was perfect shorthand for the ire in playing host to these horrible visitors.

It is a play that requires its two actors to switch characters repeatedly, yet the largest risk in Marie Jones' script is placing a suicide right in the middle of the larks and comedy. What is a short description of Sean's death on the page is made mythic here, the video camera allowing the audience to join Sean in his last moments in the water—seeing the stones in his hands, then putting those in his pockets. A sudden dramatic turn like this can pack more of an emotional wallop, but it can also be confusing because it is so unexpected to an audience who up to now have been happy chuckling along. Thankfully, Director Travis Handcock, and his cast do splendidly in navigating us from comedy to tragedy and back up again in a way that feels coherent and truthful.

## LE PÈRE NOËL EST UNE ORDURE

by Josiane Balasko, Marie-Anne Chazel, Christian Clavier, Gerard Juenot, Thierry L'Hermitte, Bruno Moynot  
Melbourne French Theatre  
Directed by Bruce Cochrane  
Reviewed by Andrew Gemmell – May 3, 2018

In the late '70s there was a nightclub in Paris called Le Splendid. Like its cousin, Second City in Chicago, founded in the '50s, Le Splendid discovered and presented a diverse group of writer-performers. The writers of this show were members of that troupe and it seems to have been written to showcase their individual comedic talents, without much regard to narrative. Like Second City, whose output was not to everyone's liking (*Animal House*,



(l-r) Guillaume Sabouraud, Karim Bouriah-Lopez and Alexis Renou in Melbourne French Theatre's *Le Père Noël Est Une Ordure*. Photo by Julian Regan.

*Saturday Night Live*, *Blues Brothers* and much of the *National Lampoon* franchise), members of Le Splendid attracted a cult following in France and the group later went on to write and perform in several very successful outings on stage and screen. This play was made into a hugely popular movie in 1982 by Jean-Marie Poiré.

Bruce Cochrane has worked with this company frequently, perhaps more successfully with the classic French comedies, like those of Molière. He is a self-confessed Francophile and his taste obviously includes this strange homage to the absurd. This reviewer found it difficult going.

Mortez (Alexis Renou) and Therese ((Dominique Croset) work at a telephone helpline for depressed people and they are attending to business, reluctantly, on Christmas Eve in the Paris office. Usually, in circumstances like this, the location of the volunteers is unknown but for various reasons, including a misguided elevator, they begin to receive visits from their clients; Katia (Guillaume Sabouraud), a depressed transvestite, a Serb named M. Preskovic, played by Richard Ryan who offers various suspicious pastries and Josette (Candice Blondeau), a heavily pregnant woman on the run from her violent fiancé, Félix (Karim Bouriah-Lopez). Félix is working as a Santa Claus and turns up, in costume and carrying a gun. Each of these performers successfully portray what little character the protagonists possess but to me Guillaume and Richard find the best mix of pathos and humour.

The current venue for the Melbourne French Theatre is at the City Library at Docklands and they use the new space well. The stage is smallish and the tiered audience is close. The set is well lit throughout (lighting design and operation by Greg Abendroth). The actors were all audible (sound by Alain Croset and Greg Rochlin). Continuing on technical matters, the dialogue was translated into English and projected, *comme PowerPoint*, on the wall behind the action. I found this enormously difficult; to read quickly while attempting to appreciate the nuances the actors may have been attempting to portray. I cannot think of a solution to this. Mind you, almost all of the actors and the vast majority of the audience were from France, or its dominions, so it may not be worth the distraction.

It is a credit to the company that all of the performances of this show sold out quickly. There were frequent matinees, mainly aimed at students. This is not only a credit to the company's organisation but to Melbourne itself, whose population is culturally diverse enough to support this play, amongst a wide variety of other artistic offerings.

## AGNES OF GOD

by John Pielmeier  
Powderkeg Players  
Directed by Drew Mason  
Reviewed by Andrew Gemmell – May 12, 2018

This may sound like a new company but it is not. The Sunshine Community Theatre has been with us for a long while and it has resumed its former name, one that reflects the predominance of munitions storage, pre- and post-ww2, in the north-west of Melbourne, a situation generally unknown in our theatre heartland in the east.

This play is popular and is frequently performed. It was successfully adapted for the silver screen by Norman Jewison in 1985, with such luminaries as Jane Fonda and Anne Bancroft in the lead roles.

I was talking to experienced actor and director Drew Mason after the show and he told me that he originally intended the piece to portray an argument between science and religion. In pre-production and, in conversation with his talented and intelligent cast, the emphasis changed. Every member, including Drew, an avowed agnostic, had a viewpoint about the spiritual meaning of the play and that is how the final production evolved.

The story is set in a convent and a novitiate, Sister Agnes (Gemma Francis), is about to be charged with the manslaughter of a

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