



PERFORMANCE REVIEW

FLAGRANT DÉLIRE [IN FLAGRANTE DELIRIUM] [FLAGRANTLY DELIRIOUS]

Reviewed by Genevieve Ryan,

23 Aug 2023

Author: Jean-Pierre Martinez

Director: Luca Romani

Theatre Company: Melbourne French Theatre Inc.



*L-R: Paola Villanueva as
Commissaire Ramirez - Hector Lesay
as Le Baron de Casteljarnac – Karim
Bouriah-Lopez as Inspecteur Bordeli*

– Damien Kenny as Commissaire Navarin - Ioanna Gagani as Mme la Divisionnaire Delatruffe – Olivia Bula as La Baronne de Casteljarnac – and seated, Léo Travé as Le Cadavre.
Photographer: Luca Romani



L-R: Ioanna Gagani, Olivia Bula, Damien Kenny, Hector Lesay
Photographer: Nick Orloff



REVIEW

This play is the 108th production of the Melbourne French Theatre (MFT), which was founded in 1977, and this is its premier in Australia. Jean-Pierre Martinez is a contemporary French playwright who has written over 100 comedies and this play is written in the crime comedy genre, which combines elements of comedy and suspense related to police investigations. Often featuring atypical characters or absurd situations, crime comedy can also include elements of social satire or parody. Certainly, in this particular production corruption and cost cutting in the French police force are more than passing references.

The action takes place in an old-fashioned police station and the set, designed by Jiaqi Sun and assisted by Gabriel Aharfi, evokes this with the use of an antiquated

telephone and other similar props as well as outdated furniture.

English surtitles are projected onto a blank white wall upstage, for the benefit of those in the audience (including your reviewer) who had no more than a smattering of school French to call on. The stage was raised above the level seating, which worked quite well but unfortunately meant the actors often blocked the surtitles on the upstage wall, leaving some non-French speaking audience members having to strain to see the words and subsequently missing dialogue. This was problematic in the context of a play concerning mystery and crime. The operation of the surtitles was sometimes delayed or disarranged, which was an added problem for particular aforementioned audience members. Whilst I felt the performance space was workable, the positioning of the surtitles needs to be addressed if this space and stage are to be used for further productions.

The play opens with the impending retirement of Police Commissioner Navarin, played by Damien Kenny. He is in the company of Inspector Bordeli, a rather inebriated soul, carefully concealing a bottle of whisky beneath his desk. Bordeli is artfully portrayed by Karim Bouriah-Lopez. Chief Commissioner Delatruffe, played by Ioanna Gagani, arrives on the scene to announce the replacement of the recently deceased Commissioner Ramirez by none other than his daughter, Conchita Ramirez, portrayed by Paola Villanueva. No sooner does the new Commissioner Ramirez arrive than we are joined by Baroness Margarita de Casteljarnac, played by Olivia Bula, reporting the supposed death of her husband, Baron de Casteljarnac, locked inadvertently in the home sauna all night. Whilst in the midst of this investigation the character of Franck Masquelier appears, wearing a rather conspicuous wig and moustache, which he continually checks to ensure it is in the right place and declares he is a playwright whose work, 'Flagrant Delirium', has been plagiarised by Baron Casteljarnac. His play, ironically, concerns a rather confusing detective story, not unlike the one being performed. It evolves that Casteljarnac, played by Hector Lesay, is a crook and an illusionist and he and Masquelier are the same person. Therefore, the corpse found in the sauna is someone else entirely. The story, not wanting to give everything away, only becomes more convoluted with more fraudsters being revealed and the players coming to realise they are part of a play within a play.

The play, although difficult to follow both in content and having to read the English surtitles, was quite witty and most actors delivered their dialogue in rapid succession, which added to the humour and elicited laughter from the audience. Both Damien Kenny and Ioanna Gagani gave confident, believable performances as experienced police investigators, although I think Kenny was sometimes distracted by the disarranged surtitles, glancing up at them from time to time. Karim Bouriah-Lopez gave a comical performance as the alcoholic Bordeli. His timing was very good and

the audience seemed to enjoy his character. His facial expressions and mannerisms were also well done and he appeared confident in his role. Paola Villanueva portrayed the character of Conchita Ramirez with a somewhat overplayed assertiveness. She would often stand with hands on hips, which I found off-putting. Olivia Bula and Hector Lesay both created believable characters. Leo Trave completed the ensemble with a convincing performance as the corpse!

Costumes, by Victoria Mead, were appropriate for the characters and lighting was ably designed and handled by Greg Abendroth. Stage Management was in the capable hands of Monica Bolt.

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