

BWW Review: THE GOLDEN DRAGON at The Bakehouse Theatre

by Barry Lenny Jul. 10, 2017

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Reviewed by Barry Lenny, Saturday 8th July 2017.

The Golden Dragon (*Der Goldene Drache*) is a 2009 play by German writer, Roland Schimmelpfennig, translated by David Tushingham and directed by Joh Hartog for the Bakehouse Theatre Company. It is set in and around a Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese restaurant, the Golden Dragon, located on

the ground floor of a block of residential flats.

Mark Healy, Clare Mansfield, Jo Pugh, BrenDan Cooney, and Robbie Greenwell play the five people who work in the restaurant, and all of the other characters whom we meet. Their roles are not assigned by any conventions; young play old, females play males, and vice versa, and two of the cast play insects, as Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper, in this version, a cricket, is played out.

Tammy Boden's superb set design places a cramped kitchen centre stage, complete with a working wok burner, and raised stages either side that become the flats, or the seated area of the restaurant. Stephen Dean has had his work cut out for him in designing the complex lighting for this production, with changes every few minutes as all of the segments are played out.

The staff members all bustle about in the tiny kitchen, whilst a young boy screams with pain from a toothache. He cannot be taken to a dentist as he is an illegal immigrant, here looking for his sister, another illegal immigrant, who has mysteriously gone missing.

An old man occupies one flat, while his granddaughter and her lover occupy another, with her partner's temper rising as she has become pregnant. A man and wife occupy another flat, but their marriage that is failing as she has found a new love and is planning to leave. The owner of the small store, that seems to sell everything imaginable, uses his flat as a warehouse, cramming it with stock. Two airline hostesses share another flat.

Brecht's concept of Epic Theatre is behind this production, with actors breaking the fourth wall and setting up scenes with explanatory monologues, speaking directly to the audience while in character, verbalising their stage directions, and stepping in and out of

character. Unlike Realism or Naturalism, which engage the senses and emotions, Brecht's approach was to engage the intellect, and constantly reminding the audience that they are in a theatre watching a play was his way to achieve this. This is juxtaposed, though, against elements of Realism, in a full set and developed characters.

There is a great deal in this play to engage the intellect. **as The Many** brief scenes unfold, links are made, layers build up, more of the story appears, and concepts develop. Illegal immigration is only one of the starting points and threads running through the work, but to say more would give away too much. That is for future audiences to discover.

Hartog fully understands Brecht's approach, which is unsurprising as he taught in the drama course at Flinders University. He exhibits a clear vision for this production and has conveyed that to his excellent cast. The five performers are a tight ensemble, switching characters at rapid speed and instantly going from humour to poignant and even tragic moments of great power.

The audience, unfamiliar with Brechtian theatre, found laughter in the actors speaking their directions, such as inserting the word "pause" into their dialogue, interpreting it as deliberate humour. This is not, though, a comedy, as it deals with serious and very relevant socio-political matters.

It is not often that we see a good Epic Theatre style of production in Adelaide, and so right there is one reason to catch this production, but the main reason is that this is a superb production in its own right. The set, lighting, direction, and performances are all of such a high standard, and the combination results in an evening of theatre that should not be missed.