

Hoovering on the Edge Review by Perigueux 27/5/14

Anyone who has experienced the vagaries of adult community education will probably have encountered times when writing, poetry, painting and other discipline sessions have wandered conversationally onto a wayward path with a frustrated tutor struggling to return to the lesson.

ZPAC Theatre's latest production, *Hoovering on the Edge*, holds a mirror up to that digressive human trait. When seven British ladies decide to take an educational writing course in sunny Spain relationships develop and tales are told. The characters are diverse and all, bar one -*Clare*- are middle-aged. Their young tutor Gareth is out-numbered, out-maneuvred and completely out-classed by his manipulative pupils.

In this character and twist driven comedy, the girls have fun and so do the audience. During the second act the play delivers the latent plot and although humour is maintained there are surprises and poignancy. This is a comedy which is better viewed where ignorance (of the plot) is bliss.

This production is an Australian Premier and, although it is a kindred spirit to the popular *Calendar Girls*, it has its own sparkle and pathos.

Ann Hopwell the director also directed this Company's production of *Cemetery Club* some time ago. She was *Miss Marple* in *A Murder is Announced*. Ms Hopwell has gained critical acclaim directing around Australia particularly in Perth. Here she has chosen and placed her cast well. I particularly liked the actors' contrasting looks, helped by distinctive costumes and the clean cut delineation of character. To that extent the casting was inspired.

Lighting (Roy Hopwell), effects (George MacLean) and set (constructed by John Hens, Phil Jennings, Roy Hopwell and crew and engineered by Roger Jennings) are always a plus for this company. Under the control of stage manager, Suzanne Geddes and assistant, Margaret Connelly, the off stage crews are a talented lot.

There are new faces in the cast and I was impressed by all. Louise Fantinel was a "all a spade a spade" *Rita*, rightly resisting the script's open invitation to play over the top. She employed a down to earth English regional accent to extract the comedic and dramatic juice.

A comparative newcomer to the stage, Christine Rayner, gently imbued sensitivity into a rational *Gwen* - so natural in a part that doesn't have many of the eccentric hooks, on which actors love to hang their visceral hats.

Tamara Bailey, as *Moir*, acts the prim and proper "plain Jane" to perfection and Judith La'Forest is perfect as the flamboyant counterpoint, *Honor*. Liane Mills (Kidd) plays a well turned-out and shapely *Sue*, delivering the best expletive explosion I have ever heard. Val Grainger is a suitably subdued *Chris* and talented Taylor Dunn plays the attractive hippy *Clare* as sweetly as a Pan Flute. The lone male, Nathan Richter, in the role of *Gareth*, the tutor, was script-wise and precise as a young frustrated male yet to understand that women are unfathomable.

In summary the production is a great two hours of entertainment. You will laugh a lot, you will tear-up a little and, when you leave theatre, you will be a happier theatre-goer than the one who entered a couple of hours before.