

A legend and his young cast hilariously explore married life

SHOW: THE OPEN COUPLE

DIRECTOR: CHRIS WEARE

CAST: LARICA SCHNELL AND NATHAN LYNN

VENUE: ALEXANDER UPSTAIRS THEATRE, NIGHTLY AT 7PM UNTIL SATURDAY

REVIEW: PETER TROMP

Despite being a Fleur du Cap Lifetime Achievement honouree, Chris Weare remains one of the quirkiest, most effervescent directors our city has to offer. Even after all this time in the industry, Weare's productions impart on one the impression of a man that is allergic to resting on his laurels. 'The Open Couple' is another raucously entertaining, and deftly staged production from Weare that recalls the go-for-broke hilarity of one his best outputs in recent times, 'Decadence'; the Steven Berkoff, Thatcher era play that became something of a national sensation when it toured the country some years ago.

This work by Italian theatre maestro Dario Fo details the turbulent relationship of a couple that has decided to open the doors of their marriage to outside partners. The man has somehow convinced his matrimonial partner that this is the politically correct thing to do in the day and age they find themselves in, but it doesn't take long for the audience to realise just how high he is on his own BS. That he is totally insensitive to the obvious emotional pain his actions and postulations



Larica Schnell and Nathan Lynn in 'The Open Couple'

are causing his wife initially makes him somewhat of an unsympathetic character in the eyes of the audience. (This part was played by Fo himself, initially; in the opening production in the 1980s.)

The wife is constantly in the throes of suicidal tantrums, until she starts to realise that the best way to reignite her husband's interest in her is to play him at his own game by making herself desirable to other men; or at least create the impression that she is.

Unsurprisingly this fuels a jealous fire within him, and before long, the two are clawing at each other again.

Fo effectively shows how easily the power dynamics can shift in a marriage, but also how perilous it is to cling to the idea of permanent

attraction. When the attraction between the couple is no longer mutual, one is forced to create manufactured situations for that spark to re-emerge, but that in turns unbalances them in other ways. The fact that the play doesn't provide easy answers to the questions it posits might prove to be frustrating to some, but it is exactly 'The Open Couple's' open-endedness that will make you think about it constantly in the days afterwards. Somehow you will continue to hear the couple's bickering voices in your head.

The production stars two UCT students who are in their final years, but they are already functioning at a very professional level, I would say. Larica Schnell and Nathan Lynn, as the wife and husband respectively, excel in delivering the play's delicate mixture of pathos and humour. Both have bright futures ahead of themselves for sure, and in Weare, they've been working with one of the best nurturers in the biz, so watch out for them on our stages and screens in the coming years.

** Tickets can be purchased and reserved without payment online at shows.alexanderbar.co.za or, at the bar. For telephone bookings and for more information, call 021 300 1652.*

The Alexander Bar & Café is situated on 76 Strand Street (Corner Loop), Cape Town CBD.