Play With Repeats is a fractured narrative which, as its title suggests, is a series of repetitions, echoes, variations on a theme, and might-have-beens. Anthony Steadman is a man turning forty. He works as a technician for a speaker coil manufacturer and has no friends. The play is a kind of accidental odyssey as he follows a series of prompts, cues and possible scenarios.

He begins in a pub, sipping on his holstein and watching others altogether too intently. Insinuating himself into conversation with a nearby couple, Nick and Kate, like the guileless Lotte in Botho Strauss’s Big and Little, he proceeds to tell them about their pain and unhappiness. It is understandably disconcerting and unwelcome and triggers an explosive response. He shows them a calling card for a man named Lamine, a blind psychic in old carpet slippers who tells him a Beckettian story about the Idiot in the City.

We see Steadman at his workplace re-imagining a demand for promotion and at a bus stop serenading a young woman Heather until alcohol turns his ardour to menace. Are these events for the first time or Walter Mitty-ish re-runs ? At a laundrette he meets Laurence Bott, author of the jeremiad World in Decay who gives him a card from a man named Lamine. Hasn’t this happened already ? In a repeat of the pub scene his encounter with the couple has fatal consequences. Or does it ?

All this empirical instability makes Martin Crimp’s play both intriguing and unsettling, magnified by the comically absurd Steadman relentlessly enquiring, analysing and re-constructing events.

In a one-off venture at the Balcony Theatre, the Play With Repeats company has given us a well-managed production, ably directed by Chris Drummond with design by Gaelle Mellis. Her thriftily functional set- two sky blue screens at each end of an acting area located between opposing sets of seats - keeps the action close to the audience. Mark Pennington’s
lighting is pleasingly fluid and the original music by Julian Ferraretto deserves particular mention.

As do the performers. As Steadman, Geoff Revell has found a role that well suits his expressive comic talents. Always a contributor, it is especially gratifying to see him with a task which allows him to explore his range more fully. His performance is central and represents some of his best work. Justin Moore and Jacqueline Cook are convincing as the besieged pub couple and Moore is especially lively as the obnoxious Terry. Cathy Adamek is memorable in the bus shelter scene and Phil Spruce, also at his best for some time, makes the most of his opportunities with two marvellous eccentrics - the chortling Lamine and Bott, the pariah philosopher.

*Play With Repeats* is a welcome project- an inventive and reflective play about living and partly living presented by an accomplished and experienced local company. Chris Drummond received an emerging artist award last year and this production further commends him. Perhaps we will see a return season of this venture - it is a play with repeats well worth repeating.