Pleasure In Company of Women

Murray Bramwell’s Reviews

 появино in - The Australian

Boston Marriage
by David Mamet

State Theatre Company of South Australia.
The Space, Adelaide Festival Centre.
19 October until 6 November

In the late nineteenth century when two women lived together, whether for companionship, or somewhat more than that, it was known as a Boston marriage - reflecting both the feminist sophistication of the arrangement and its prevalence in that American city. It is the subject of Henry James’s novel, The Bostonians, and, in this recent work, playwright David Mamet uses it as the occasion for a very diverting comic turn.

Anna (Victoria Longley) and Claire (Rachel Szalay) are intimate companions but with an eye for other things. In Anna’s case it is the money to support a pampered lifestyle which she receives from a wealthy “male protector”. For Claire it is the prospect of a delectable young woman with whom she arranges an assignation in Anna’s apartment. That one circumstance is related to the other is the occasion for farce and satiric comedy heightened by the down-to-earth presence of the maid (Amber McMahon) whose name is Catherine but neither of the self-absorbed women is capable of remembering that.

Director Catherine Fitzgerald and an able cast do well with a play that has both a period setting and a current twist. David Mamet is a master of stage language and here, with his mix of fin de siecle pastiche and clunking anachronisms he hugely enjoys himself. Perhaps he enjoys himself a little too much because his aphoristic quips and other verbal schtick often have less of a Wildean elegance than the over-considered convolutions of Joe Orton. This sometimes makes it hard for the actors, particularly Victoria Longley, to navigate the text, especially pitching it in an Anglo-American accent which at time slips below the Mason Dixon line.

Mary Moore’s art nouveau staircase in pale botanic greens with tendrils of glistering gold is not only stylistically apt, it plays well, especially with Amber McMahon’s goonish appearances through the stage floor and the amount of comic business with the front doorbell. Rachel Szalay has a good-natured wickedness in her amorous intrigues and Victoria Longley
is especially droll when she melodramatically prepares for her imagined ruin. With her variously gormless, tearful and argumentative entrances Amber McMahon is poised to steal the show but Catherine Fitzgerald isn’t about to let that happen. Boston Marriage is an entertaining reminder that all couples are odd couples and, when he is not trying too hard to be clever, the famously blokey David Mamet shows how much he too can enjoy the company of women.