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ON STAGE IN THE WESTERN CAPE--REVIEWS

## Mind-bending escapism

Review by Daniel Dercksen (August 11, 2010)

If there's one play that everyone is talking about, it's the wonderfully absurd *Highway Crossing or a Tale of A Golden Fish* that is now bending the minds of audiences at the Intimate Theatre until August 29.

It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> play in The Mechanicals' current 'Lunatic Fringe' repertory season and it's dusting the cobwebs off traditional theatre fair and stirring up heated debate.

This is theatre that challenges and reforms.

Estonian playwright Jaan Tatte's play falls under the banner of Theatre of the Absurd, a movement that originated in the late 40s, 50s and 60s when primarily European playwrights like Samuel Becket (*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*), Jean Genet (*The Maids*), Harold Pinter (*The Birthday Party*), Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*), Edward Albee (*The Zoo Story*) unleashed their wild creativity on humanity.

Since then it has evolved into an art form that lies comfortable with contemporary audiences' breastfed on traditional theatre and thriving for cult films, experimental and workshop productions, and unconventional theatre.

Traditional conventions are challenged and the intellect stimulated.

Absurdist Theatre does not focus on logical acts, realistic occurrences, or traditional character development.

Instead it focuses on human beings trapped in an incomprehensible world, subject to any occurrence, no matter how illogical.

The 'humans' in *Highway Crossing or a Tale of A Golden Fish* are a couple (Deborah Vieyra and Louis Viljoen) who seek refuge at a farmhouse during a stormy night where their host (Andrew Laubscher) seduces their innocence, threatens their mortality, and corrupts their moral values.

Obsession over material wealth, loyalty, obsessive lust, mendacity and maliciousness are all thrown into a melting pot that stirs emotions and challenges perceptions.

Although absurdist theatre might seem weird and unusual, it is as familiar as Red Riding Hood going to visit Granny or Brad and Janet being lured into Transylvanian decadence by the malevolent Dr. Frank N' Furter.

From the moment we encounter a relatively normal setting, everything seems normal, but at the end of the play, even the black and white chequered tiles seem bent out of shape.

When Tatte's play suddenly turns on the audience and reveals its true nature, the drama ignites. And then, just as we seek comfort in its delicious wackiness the screw turns and we soon realise that it is indeed the audience who has been lured into a deceitful web.

It is the contrasting nature and inevitability of the play that intrigues.

When Jason Potgieter enters the play it suddenly feels as if we are witnessing a cross pollination of Harold Pinter and Sam Shepard.

Also, when you take into consideration that the characters are referred to as a Carp, Whitefish, Sprat and Pike-perch, and that the play is littered with subtextual jewels - references to fishing and Laura stepping out of the ocean like a mermaid - and the paintings on the set depicting portraits of fish, there is much more brimming underneath the surface than meets the eye.

That is the wonderfully pliable nature of plays like *Highway Crossing or a Tale of A Golden Fish*; it's a malleable entity that shape-shifts from one extreme to the next, then digresses just when transformation is almost achieved.

It's a difficult play to pull off and the ensemble succeed admirably, well supported by Daniel Collemore's lighting design that beautifully conjures up shades of heaven and hell. Guy De

