

BWW Review: A Melodic Exploration of Love in Charming HAPPY NEW YEAR at Fugard Studio

by Lindsay Kruger Feb. 22, 2019



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The latest adaption from **David Kramer**, HAPPY NEW YEAR (A PLAY WITH SONGS) is brought to the Fugard Studio this season as a delightful romcom with international direction behind it and local talent at its forefront.

Following a whirlwind long weekend over New Year's, Bree Street-crossed lovers Lee-André and Dan find themselves in bed together after a disappointing boozy night out and

unexpectedly bump into each other the next day. What follows is us playing witness to their hidden flaws coming out to play as their relationship rollercoasters in the space of 5 days. Reminiscent to me of a production like **THE LAST FIVE YEARS**, HAPPY NEW YEAR's story is supported by Lee-André and Dan's soliloquy-esque narration as they have different takes on the experiences they are going through together. What's interesting about this musical romcom is that the score does not actually so much explain the action onstage but more so support it in catchy acoustic song snippets. From harmonized duets to heartfelt ballads, I'm sad soundtracks weren't available to purchase after the show.

Bianca Flanders plays lawyer Lee-André, whose upper-class De Waterkant flat is unmatched by her chaotic flouncing over the weekend. From her initial entrance in a tight red dress and from the first notes sung in her husky mezzo-soprano, Flanders establishes herself and her character as a force to be reckoned with. She does a superb job sailing between stable society girl and vulnerable singleton, allowing her emotive eyes to do most of the talking.

A versatile actress and singer in her own right, she further proves her versatility by doubling and sometimes tripling up as characters within the production. Memorable as the formidable crime boss Mr. Big, her simplicity in donning a pink jacket and black loafers brings out a whole different characterization from Flanders that you immediately forget the feminine lead she'd been skillfully portraying.





Opposite her as pseudo love interest, pseudo polar opposite, Dean Balie as Dan excels in his leading man role. Perhaps not the most charming nor traditional in romcom character leads, Dan's appeal comes in his gentle dealings with Lee-André that bring a smile to one's face upon memory. Balie also floats in and out of character and demonstrates a well-done character study in his lead role. Despite the costars being engaged in real life, their initial floundering meet-cute, awkward run-ins and excitement of a long weekend are so authentic that a long-term chemistry between the two is condensed in the short production perfectly.

Almost another lead in its own right, the production's backdrop is so cleverly done and on cue that it adds a new dimension to an otherwise simplistic setting. Black and white



illustrations reminiscent of familiar settings transport one entirely from Lee-André's flat to St George's Cathedral to the Bo-Kaap, and back again. As the ideal episode of escapism for a night, HAPPY NEW YEAR also remains familiar and relatable in its Cape Town setting.

Furthermore, the use of staging and blocking in terms of direction works incredibly well for the space given and the book. International director **Nicolas Kent** has done fantastically to showcase his **well-understood gained knowledge of local culture**, and the production radiates with a charm to delight audiences for its entire 90 minute duration.

A wonderfully fun, cheeky and nonconventional journey of self-discovery and love, this small production has a lot of heart behind and in it.

Photo credit: Claude Barnardo

*HAPPY NEW YEAR will be performed at The Fugard **Studio Theatre** at 8pm with matinees at 4pm on Saturdays. Tickets from R160 to R220 can be booked through The Fugard Theatre box office on 021 461 4554 or through The Fugard Theatre's website at www.thefugard.com*