

HAPPY NEW YEAR REVIEW

23 February 2019

HAPPY NEW YEAR. Written by David Greig and Gordon McIntyre. Adapted by David Kramer. Directed by Nicolas Kent. With Bianca Flanders and Dean Balie. Set design: Chris Pienaar. Costume design: Widaad Albertus. Lighting design: Marie Roux. Sound design: David Classen. Illustration: Lucie de Moyencourt. Photographs: Claude Barnardo. Fugard.



KAREN RUTTER reviews

Happy New Year is as chaotic, complex, simple and sweet as the city it is set in. And as exhilarating as the heady rush of unexpected romance. It's what happens when an opportunity is spotted, a challenge made and accepted, and the execution carried out – all with a level of skill and delight that is just a pure joy to experience. Theatre like this is very smart, but it also seduces your heart strings, and finesses your funny bones.

From Edinburgh to Cape Town

This production all came about when Nicolas Kent of The Tricycle Theatre in London showed a script called *Midsummer (A Play with Songs)* to David Kramer. Although set in Edinburgh, he felt it would work well in Cape Town. Kramer took the bait and created a local version, both in terms of script and music (there are occasional songs in the play, as the original title says). And then Bianca Flanders and Dean Balie carried it out, with Kent at the helm.

The story is deceptively straightforward. A successful lawyer hooks up with a small-time hustler for a supposedly brief night of too much booze and barenaked sex. They're really not suited, and obviously will never see each other again. Or maybe not ...

This interpretation is simply amazing. Firstly, Kramer's reworking is just spot-on, in terms of the city he lives in, the language that's spoken, the localised distinctions of class. From a tapas bar on Bree Street to a bench in the Company's Garden, from a suite at the Cape Sun hotel to a parking garage in Century City, you feel you *know* these spaces. (This has also got a lot to do with Lucie de Moyencourt's intricate black and white illustrations of each scene, which form large scale backdrops to the play. Outstanding.) And his re-jigging of the music means we get a little ghoema, a little Afro-guitar, a little klopse in the mix. It all fits sooo smoothly.



What a cast

Then we have the cast. Man, what a cast. Bianca Flanders (as high flying lawyer Lee-André) ticks many boxes each time I see her, but this outing lifts it to a new level. Not only does she imbue Lee-André with a feisty, funny and vulnerable spirit, she also takes on a few constellation roles with aplomb, plus she sings like a bloody diva. And then there's Dean Balie – phew! Again, I have seen him in a few roles, but here he is really given the chance to shine, and his portrayal of small-time

Dan with his big heart and broken dreams is both poignant and authentic. And he can play the guitar and perform like a proper pop-star! Honestly, could two people have more talent on a stage?



It's all held together with wit, grace and excellent timing by Kent, with a cleverly minimalist set by Chris Pienaar, nicely situated by De Moyencourt's afore-mentioned illustrations.

Happy New Year is just so, so wonderful. If you don't leave the theatre with a smile on your face, I'd be surprised.

In a month where Eskom switched the lights off, the SANDF invaded our beaches and the VBS Bank looting reached a new high, you really, really need this. Actually, even if all that shit hadn't happened – you still really need this.

What: Happy New Year

Where and when: Fugard Theatre from 19 February 2019

Book: 021 461 4554 or www.thefugard.com

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