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REVIEW: I Only Came to Use the Phone | Darlinghurst Theatre, Sydney

May 12, 2011 – 2:37 pm, by Lloyd Bradford Syke

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The cast of I Only Came To Use The Phone | Darlinghurst Theatre

Francisco Paulino Hermenegildo Teóduro Franco y Bahamonde. Quite a name. Quite a general. Quite an era in Spanish history. It's in the dying days of his regime that Darlinghurst Theatre's latest offering, *I Only Came to Use the Phone*, is set and in which we follows Maria's horrific journey, after her car breaks down, on a lonely road, on the way to Barcelona. She tries hitching, but noone stops, until, finally a rustic bus, full of women, picks her up and takes her on a trip, to hell and back.

The tale comes from the stinging pen of 84-year-old Nobel Prize-winning Colombian writer Gabriel José de la Concordia García Márquez. Again, quite a name. And quite an author. Affectionately known as Gabo (for obvious utilitarian reasons apart from anything else) right across Latin America, he is almost universally regarded, by those who ought to know, as one of the most significant authors of the last century (you might well know of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*), so I'm glad I've finally caught up with him, via director Netta Yashchin's adaptation of this work, first published as a short story, in the anthology *Strange Pilgrims*, in 1992.

Almost all the actors are on stage when we walk in (Yashchin appears a little later, from her bird's-eye position, seated in the front row). Charlotte Lane's production design, darkly lit by Rachel Smith, speaks of distress, literally and figuratively. Both are incredibly effective in setting up the mood of the piece. The other thing that's immediately, exquisitely apparent is the fine fingering of flamenco guitarist, Damian Wright, who weaves his musical magic all the way through.

Just six incredibly talented actors, in Julia Billington, David Hansen, Annabelle Stephenson, Dorje Swallow, Fayssal Bazzi, Michael Whalley and Yashchin (who is, ironically, the least of them) play no less than 36 richly evolved and evoked characters, who enjoy the distinct pleasure of enchanting us with the very particular, idiosyncratic elegance of Marquez' words. Yashchin and her cast seem adept at manipulating this and drawing us inexorably in to this web of intrigue and menace, much as we might've been, as children, listening to a favourite fairytale.

This, of course, is a very adult fairytale; a kind of Spanish-speaking *Cuckoo's Nest*, via Stephen King and Isabelle Allende. Marquez is a master of magical realism and has probably done as much as or more than anyone else to popularise the genre. Yashchin's ensemble proves a treasure-trove of talent in bringing this out, dramatically.

Should this team continue in this vein, producing works of this quality, it will emerge, I believe, as one of the great small theatre companies internationally. Of course, whether it comes to be recognised as such is a whole other question.

The details: *I Only Came to Use the Phone* plays the Darlinghurst Theatre in Sydney until May 29. Tickets on the [venue website](#).

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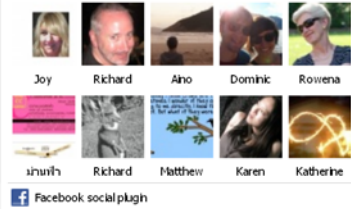
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