



I Only Came to Use the Phone at Darlinghurst Theatre

By Matt D'Silva, 6th May, 2011

I'm walking into the theatre filled with a light smoke haze with six people sitting around a disheveled room that looks like a prison cell. A man sits in the corner strumming his guitar and the actors are tapping their feet and dancing in time with the rhythm. This looks like it is going to be an interesting production.

A car breaks down by the side of the road. Maria (Annabelle Stephenson) is stuck on a lonely highway desperately trying to get a car to stop and help. Every passing car is ignoring her until a bus pulls up and lets her aboard. The bus is full of nondescript women heavily sedated wearing blankets heading to a common destination. Maria is promised access to a telephone so she can call her husband Saturno (Dorje Swallow) once the bus reaches its final location.

Arriving at the large dominating building everyone is herded into a common room and allocated a bed. Maria is assigned a space and told she will be allowed the telephone when she is ready. Maria has just been checked into a mental institution and nobody knows she is there.

Director Netta Yashchin has produced a challenging play that is funny, scary and very dark. The ensemble cast work beautifully together playing various characters to present a story about the loss of freedom, living a nightmare and mental torment.

I Only Came to Use the Phone is based on the short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The performance is about confusion and loss of identity. The idea that someone has arrived at a place and been confused for an inmate and then forcibly detained is a nightmare. This story is beautifully written and highlights the dark and seedy undertones of life in a mental institution.

Charlotte Lane has designed a set that captures the atmosphere of an oppressive, suffocating and soul-destroying place that people call home. Living in a place where people lose their identity and are treated as animals by carers is depressing and Charlotte has designed the perfect set.

The cast are superb. They are fantastic to watch on stage working as an ensemble. Julia Billington is captivating as her various roles and hysterical as the cat. Sex on a stick Dorje Swallow is eye candy and very good as Saturno and if he wasn't such a great actor on stage in the performance I would still advise everyone to go see this production to see him without his shirt. Stand out performance is Annabelle Stephenson as Maria. Her performance is chilling and very surreal. You see her slowly break apart from a normal happy individual to a person trapped and lost in confinement.

I Only Came to Use the Phone is a tremendous production. It is engaging with the use of live music and humour and challenging with the theme of mental torture. Don't get me wrong this a very dark and surreal production about the hell of a mental patient or in the case of Maria the slow decent into insanity.