

Addicted To Love

The worst feeling in the world for any theatre reviewer is to spend an evening investing emotionally in a piece only to come out sitting on the fence when it's all over.

Loving a good play is easy; loathing a bad play is even easier. But fence sitting is just no fun at all. This is where I find myself with *The Affairs of Anatol* on stage at Artword Theatre until October 9.

Perhaps it comes down to what you want in an offering: Laughter, anger, shock, intrigue—almost all of which are absent from Viennese playwright **Arthur Schnitzler's** 1893 script.

Comprised of seven segments involving women the central character wants to bed, wed, or just can't get out of his head, *The Affairs of Anatol* asks pinnacle questions about love. Are we in love with a person, the memory of that person, or are we in love with the idea of being in love?

John O'Callaghan is delightful as the affluent *Anatol* who is always on the prowl for the shag to end all shags. *Anatol's* intentions always seem good for someone with the scruples most would love to hate. The actor, however, plays the character with a wholesomeness that would make any of his would be sheetwetters weak in the knees. O'Callaghan clearly understands *Anatol's* motivation and confusion in his pursuit of so-called happiness without ever letting the audience take sides as a result of his questionable behaviour. This is a great feat to say the least.

There's admiration o' plenty for the way **James S. Murray** juggles duty of friendship and duty of ethics as *Anatol's* male counterpart *Max*. The character refuses to give up on his perennially love struck acquaintance not matter how deep a hole *Anatol* digs himself.

All seven women look and sound luscious in their respective roles. Those that truly stand out—not because of talent but because of depth of text—are **Tara Samuel's** the-truth-comes-with-a-price *Emily*, **Marie Beath Badian's** flighty and intoxicated *Mimi*, and **Darlene Spencer's** neurotically obsessive *Iлона*.

So why does the play still keep me dead centre of love and loathe?

Certainly not on the part of director **Sue Miner** who gets the most of her cast on a minimal set and creates striking visual and musical atmosphere in this staging. Nor is **Victoria Wallace** or **Erika Connor** suspect in this indecision. Their costumes are just fine as **Gavin McDonald's** lighting is also quite well done, warmly lighting several of the scenes to great effect both front and back of stage.

Then the problem ostensibly lies in the script. There are no painful lows to mention yet the story lacks any boastful highs.

Sadly, *The Affairs of Anatol* fails to dispel any substantial myths about love or uncover any profound truths about the subject matter either.

If a comfortable ride is what entertains you in the theatre, make no mistake this one has the right cushioning. But if rolling hills and the occasional sharp turn is what you demand in a play, *The Affairs of Anatol* will leave you a bit flat.

The cast of *The Affairs of Anatol* flirt with the idea if people are in love with the idea of being in love.

The Affairs of Anatol by Arthur Schnitzler September 15 – October 9, 2005 **Artword Theatre**, 75 Portland Street, Toronto, Ontario **Tickets** \$16.00 – \$31.00 (416) 923-4183 **Starring** John O'Callaghan, James Murray, Marie Beath Badian, Kim Kuhteubl, Lindsay McMahon, Stacie Mistysyn, Tara Samuel, Darlene Spencer, and Kathryn Winslow **Director** Sue Miner **Set** Jackie Chau **Costumes** Victoria Wallace and Erika Connor **Lighting** Gavin McDonald **Stage Manager** Angie Stillitano