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It is with great pleasure that I have been asked to review the latest production of the Yarra Valley by Exit Theatre, ***The Colour of Fire*** which ran from 23rd to 26th March 2016 at the Warburton Arts Centre. Directed by Australia’s own John Wood and written by Nadio Fragnito who has studied and performed all across Australia. Returning to the stage is the lovely Suhasini Seelin and charismatic Kristof Kacmarek and introducing Elizabeth O ‘ Callaghan and Ben Freehand. The story hooks you in right from the word go as we are plunged into the very intimate world of Eva & Alex, a couple who are drifting apart and who are half way through an argument about the fact that Eva has an art exhibition coming up and Alex is feeling ignored. It seems Eva is very fired up and emotional – she’s drinking wine at 10am – and that there is more to this story than is evident at the start. Indeed, as the play progresses, we get to travel with Eva through her devastating grief over events that took place in the Black Saturday Bushfires.

But do not be fooled. This is not a play about bushfires only. Oh no, it is multi-layered and has a plot twist at the end that you could never predict. ***The Colour of Fire*** also explores the fire necessary to propel a career, particularly that of an artist and her art that depicts fire; the fire of devastation that exists after loss when the grief sets in; the fire of a man in deep denial who becomes angry and embittered with the world; the fire of recovery one senses in their heart when a healing takes place and grief begins to subside; also, the fire and passion that exists between a man and a woman. Seelin had me in tears when her character, Eva, is finally confronted about her aggressive behavior and has a heart wrenching and very public break down on the night of her exhibition. And Kacmarek, playing the part of Jack, is a man whose secret love is wrenched from him but who must keep it all inside and remain “tough and not weak,” gave a gut-wrenching performance. In addition to that, the roles of Heather and Alex were also excellently brought to life and were chief in providing the catalyst for the main character’s emotional states and ultimate healing.

Fragnito wrote the piece as a monologue after she overheard a conversation on a train. She submitted it to a writing competition and the rest is history. The play has a distinct John Wood’s flavour: sincere, personable, down to earth and easily understood, as per all of his characters – with no hint of ego at all even after an enviable forty years plus in the Australian show business industry. And, also like the man himself which I can personally vouch for, having known John as a friend for some years. His direction is very evident from the opening scene and as I learnt after the show, it was John’s idea to provide an added element of creative genius by placing a canvas screen on the stage that cleverly projected the scenes as they were being played.

The dream of Exit Theatre, as is any theatre company, is to produce the show in the nearest Capital City. It’s my opinion that Melbourne would receive the production with open arms and I visualise it playing at the Art’s Centre. Patronage, sponsorship and donations will be greatly received and can be organised by contacting Beata Kaczmarek on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Warm regards, Linda

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