

Review

Watching porn without being a pervert

Theatre

Porn: The Musical
MITP

André Delicata

LAST time it was *Incest*, now it's Porn... I'm becoming quite the theatrical pervert. I have always enjoyed musical theatre and as a rule, I usually go to performances anticipating a pleasant night out, but nothing could have prepared me for the great time I had watching Porn: The Musical. It's a tale with an unlikely hero - shy nice-guy, Stefan Bugeja, played by an extremely funny Max Dingli in his male version of *Clueless*, who is planning to marry his long-term girlfriend, Jade, played by Trinity Fava; only to find out that she's been cheating on him again, in a wonderfully self-reflexive intro entitled *Everyone In Malta Is Related* which merged on to *So Young And Yet So Slutty*.

Jaded (pun fully intended) by his luck-less romantic life, Stefan decides to leave our shores to go to America, more specifically, New York - a clear tribute to the many classic musicals which relied heavily on the Big Apple for their setting (think NYC in *Annie*). After an encounter with a mugger, he meets Sanddy (with a Double D) a typical American blonde bombshell, interpreted very ably by Suzanne Wadge, who tells the audience the story of her sad and sordid life in a mock-country ballad which poked fun at the tear-jerkers we are often offered in musical theatre, where the principal girl tells us her heart-wrenching story and how she got to be the fallen damsel in distress she is when she meets her hero, or in



Louis Cassar, David Ellul and Toni Attard made the show an enjoyable and entertaining night out. Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

Stefan's case, her anti-hero.

She tells us that her assets allowed her to jerk more than tears off her adoring fans and when Stefan follows her to return her handbag, he finds out exactly why when she introduces him to her director, Martin Scoresleazy, portrayed with enough sleazy comedy-cum-melodrama and self-assured panache by Louis Cassar, who bids him Welcome To The World Of Porn and picks him as the fresh-faced, clueless foreigner to star in his latest creation, *Steve Bulge Goes to Town*.

After his initial surprise, Stefan agrees and is introduced to veteran porn-stud, Dr Johnny Long who is meant to take his blood for testing, but side-steps it when Stefan tells him that he's only ever been with one girl. Dr Johnny, played by a self-assured

David Ellul, whose impressively strong baritone and Canadian accent make him the strong role-model whom Stefan looks up to, goes on to explain that he earned his title as "Doctor" because he's "got a PhD" - a pretty huge... well you get the picture... in a song so hilariously and irreverently funny that the entire audience was in fits. And I suspect that the gaggle of giggly, middle-aged matrons sitting behind me also appreciated his manly physique.

Having been on a rather unsuccessful date with Sanddy, Stefan slowly begins to make amends, but when the cast discovers that they all have the same STD, the set is shut down and put on quarantine. Stefan accuses Sanddy of infecting him and storms angrily out on them and back to Malta, only to realise that it was the slutty Jade,

whose multiple infidelities had landed him with the infection in the first place and that it was he who had jeopardised the entire cast's livelihood.

To make amends, Stefan invites his friends to Malta to finish the filming at his mother's house, as the American safety bans did not apply in Europe. When they all meet Stefan again, Jade goes into bitch mode and tells the cast the truth, leading Sanddy to think that Stefan is just another man ready to take advantage of her sensitive soul.

Finally, after the film is shot, Sanddy catches Stefan singing his heart out and revealing that he's a genuine guy who is truly in love with her.

As always happens in the wonderful world of musicals, they make up and join the rest of the crew in a fun finale which

wraps everything up just so.

What makes *Porn: The Musical* so good is the fact that it is self-reflexive and self-deprecating. Excellent director Malcolm Galea scripted and wrote the original lyrics together with musicians Kris Spiteri and Boris Cezek. Mr Spiteri and Mr Cezek, who co-wrote the music did a great job coming up with punchy, upbeat tunes to reflect the zany plot and mood of the piece.

Use of minimal sets and imaginary props as well as projected visuals and a great band with backing vocals helped make the evening all the more entertaining but my ultimate favourite (admittedly followed closely by the PhD song) were the wacky cast of minor characters interpreted by Toni Attard as the Miscellaneous Man, who suffers the ultimate humiliation of being the cast's jack of all trades but never receiving due recognition. His song, *Plight Of The Miscellaneous Man* is rudely interrupted by *The Song Where Everyone Bitches*, where everybody else steals his thunder and confirms him as the rather pathetic but loveable character that he is.

A show like this relied heavily on the performers' multiple abilities in singing, acting and comic timing and this lot delivered - good diction, great singing and evident cast chemistry.

Another of the show's strengths lay in the fact that it took the mickey out of traditional musical theatre, the local scene and our often hypocritical attitude, pornography itself, with its cheesy scripts and non-plots as well as the internal politics of the theatre world - making the show a highly enjoyable and entertaining night out. Would I watch *Porn* again? The answer is easy: "...oh yes, yes, yes, yesss!"

Engaging in political relationships

Theatre

Devil's Advocate
St James Cavalier

Louise Ghirlando

PERSEVERE as a spectator, returning countless times to the theatre, even in a Maltese context and a season which is proving particularly dry. Unable to pinpoint one thing in particular that I hunger for, I know that little has rewarded that emotional or intellectual satisfaction and entertainment that the theatre is specifically able to feed. Until now, it is Unifan Theatre that has provided insight into the possibility of satisfaction in this regard.

Despite the sensationalism and provocation that they

seemingly advocate in their advertising, it is human feelings of loss and love that they succeeded in putting across in *Blasted*; it is the intense human pain surrounding the loss of a child that they hoped to convey in their banned production of *Stitching*, which I had the opportunity of witnessing in private rehearsal; and now, with Donald Freed's *Devil's Advocate*, under the direction of Michael Fenech, they are feeding us with an opportunity to engage intellectually with political drive in the very specific context of the relationship between General Nuriega and Archbishop Laboa, in a production that is dramatically coherent and aesthetically moving. More than the political self-righteousness of the US, or its manipulative global politics in the specific regard of its dealings with Panama under

the administration of G.H.W. Bush, the play looks at the developing relationship between two individuals who seek each other out in this particular political setting.

Their underlying understanding of each other is played out through humorous jibes, mutual confrontation, sympathy, and possibly even manipulation, and a movement towards finding from the other the redemption they both crave. All this is done through a script that is rhythmically poetic and challengingly engaging.

Paul Portelli as Nuriega and Manuel Cauchi as Laboa, render their characters in a three-dimensional embodiment. Mr Portelli particularly succeeds in bringing out subtle shifts in the dynamics of his performance that truly give life to his character. He physically shifts in and out of the repetitive trauma of the

deafeningly torturing sounds of rock and roll continuously being played outside the windows of Nuriega's sanctuary in an attempt at drawing him out. In a scene that shifts momentarily from the dominant realistic mode of the performance, Mr Portelli gives poetic form to Nuriega's readiness to be more open, making the move towards the possibility of redemption, even more distressing in its rawness.

The politics is complex, and would be well served by some knowledge of the context prior to viewing. Laboa's role is particularly ambiguous politically because of his representation of sanctuary, his representation of his history as the devil's advocate, and in the specifics of his own personal history and ambiguities. The references to the characters'

previous meetings play on this ambiguity further. This ambiguity does, however, enhance the unfolding intrigue of the performance in the central question which Laboa continues to ask of Nuriega: Why have you come to me? As well as in the mystery of what redemption he himself stands to gain from Nuriega.

Dramatically the performance is further enhanced by Pierre Portelli's detailed set and Chris Gatt's lighting that provides for the tension of realism and poetry in the production.

This production brings together a handful of the more mature artists that have developed an ability of working together to select and make an intriguing play rich and engaging.

The play can still be seen this weekend and next at St James Cavalier.