

UNTITLED, or The Seat of Narcissa by Sofia Chapman

REVIEWS

<http://theatrepress.com.au/2016/01/20/review-untitled-or-the-seat-of-narcissa/>

22 January 2016

Faultlessly funny

By Ross Larkin

From the outset, **a certain curiosity swells at the prospect of a play with no title**, while simultaneously bearing a highly distinct and decided one. This is not coincidental, but rather a sneaky peek into the contrary madness that awaits in **writer/director Sofia Chapman's hilarious new production.**



Initially a love triangle between three quirky, tenacious women, ***Untitled, or The Seat of Narcissa*** quickly evolves to include multiple love-crazed subjects in a chaotic swarm of hysteria while infidelity and passion abound along with music, dancing and poetry.

Penny Larkins is the egocentric and deceitful Viscountess Narcissa, who chews up her lovers and spits them out, all the while demanding the utmost respect and attention.

Falling under her spell are **Erica Chestnut** as the sassy Duchess of Dullcote and **Kate Hosking** as feisty go-getter, Baroness of Inverness, while Narcissa's seemingly dazed and confused servant, Marcello, played by **Madeline Hudson**, intersects the melodrama with great intrigue.

The humour and wit of Chapman's writing is immediate and doesn't stall for a single moment, aided by a strong and energetic cast whose comic timing and delivery **had the audience cackling from beginning to end.**

Chapman is also responsible for the **hilariously witty poetry** which merges with the play beautifully, as well as the **very fitting and engaging music and comical lyrics.** Hudson's song on the accordion with Hosking on the cello about knowing a Jewish person is a particularly priceless moment.

Add to the mix some **wacky and amusing dancing, gorgeous costumes and a slew of double entendres** and clever one-liners and the result is a barrel of non-stop laughs, comparable to the likes of *Monty Python*, *Black Adder* and *Absolutely Fabulous*. **This is one Midsumma show for the top of your list!**

Untitled, or The Seat of Narcissa is playing now at **La Mama**, 205 Faraday street, Carlton until January 31st.

Tickets available at <http://lamama.com.au/> or on (03) 9347 6948.

Images by **Annabel Warmington**

<http://www.planetartsmelb.com/128057>

UNTITLED - THEATRE REVIEW

Monday, January 25, 2016 - 15:50 [SAMSARA](#) DUNSTON



Penny Larkins - photo courtesy of La Mama

What: *Untitled*, or *The Seat of Narcissa*

When: 19 – 31 January

Where: La Mama Theatre

Written, directed, and composed by: Sophia Chapman

Performed by: Erica Chestnut, Kate Hosking, Madeline Hudson, and Penny Larkins

Set by: Alana Hunt

Lighting by: Annabel Warmington

It is such a delight to see a show – riotously hilarious show – which in no way plays down to the audience. Sophia Chapman's *Untitled* is a brilliant comedy which used rhyme, epic romanticism, and audacious wit to mock the age of the selfie, all the while celebrating rainbow love and indulgence.

There is a very loose narrative which revolves around the idea that the Baroness of Inverness (Hosking) has come to study at the seat of Viscountess Narcissa (Larkins) in order to create a military alliance. When she arrives, the Duchess of Dullcote (Chestnut) is already there for similar purposes.

The Viscountess demands all communications be in poetic form, and one of the more intellectually enjoyable aspects of the play is the clever use of a range of metric rhymes and meters. Some have gone so far as to be converted into the most hilarious songs and ditties!

As you would expect, the references in show revolve around the various aspects of the Greek tale of Narcissus. *Untitled* flips the story on its head though, and rather than it being a male Narcissus being pursued by his male suitors, the characters are all female. Taking the theme to extremes, the flower of the same name is incorporated into the tale to create a delicious finish even Shakespeare would be proud of.

Chapman has modelled her story telling on the techniques and flavour of the romantic epic quests of bygone days. The parody works in the style of *Don Quixote*, with some saucy Chaucer and some Aesop morality thrown in.

Chapman, Hosking, and Hunt were all members of the musical trio Vardos, and their depth of understanding of artistic goals is clear in the cohesion and clarity of what could be a play lost in its own absurdity. The amount and integration of music in the show also indicates this background.

The performers are delightful and each hold their own, standing out as individuals yet working flawlessly as an ensemble. Larkins is dominating as the self-indulgent Viscountess Narcissa, playing with her pawns in a *Dangerous Liaisons* fashion. Her glittering, heaving bosom bounces around in a corset not at all covered by a baroque gold coat which hides nothing and is often the most mesmerising thing in the room. Larkins' daunting stature also helps to create a wonderful energy of natural superiority as she tutors her supplicants in the art of searching for one's "grand amour".

Hosking's Baroness of Inverness is rivetingly naive and hilariously funny as she tries to win the love of Narcissa. Her poetry is witty and complex and she does everything she is asked despite endless rivalry by the Duchess (whose poetry is tragically bad, but who has the advantage of rank over everyone).

The fourth player in the ensemble is the fabulous Madeline Hudson who plays Narcissa's servant Marcella. Many actors would get lost in what, at the start, feels like a supernumerary role. Hudson's commitment to each moment and detail of physical nuance (as well as her ability to play the piano accordion) mean that she is as vital to every moment she is on stage as any of the other three.

Untitled is a play about the pathos of overwhelming self-love, but it also talks to the equally destructive force of excessive unrequited love. It asks questions about enabling and self-respect whilst revelling in the abandon of excess and indulgence. Using the florid forms of poetry, epic

quests, and baroque to tell a morality tale is the perfect synergy of form and function, and the skill of the performers keep it alive yet not weighty, funny and not diatribic.

4.5 Stars

<https://moetomelbourne.wordpress.com/2016/01/24/review-untitled-or-the-seat-of-narcissa-at-la-mama-theatre-melbourne/>



Review: “Untitled, or the Seat of Narcissa” at La Mama Theatre, Melbourne

Posted by [David Jackmanson](#)

Last Friday I was in Melbourne for the day, and I’d booked a ticket to see *Untitled, or the Seat of Narcissa* at [La Mama Theatre](#) in Carlton.

I really enjoyed the show, and you should DEFINITELY go and see it before it ends on Sunday January 31.

I was in the front row of the *tiny* space at La Mama, which meant I was literally in touching distance of the actors for big chunks of the play. I really enjoy this sort of intimate theatre – there’s nowhere for the actors to hide, and either they carry you away or you get to see them fail close up. This time, I was carried away!

Penny Larkins plays Viscountess Narcissa, the emotionally and physically dominant host who seems to spend her life pursuing and seducing beautiful women. She towers over the other actors and plays her guests off against each other, making sure she’s the prize they all strive for.



Penny Larkins plays Viscountess Narcisa. Photo by Annabel Warmington.

Erica Chestnut is the cruel, callous and imperious Duchess of Dullcote, who, because she outranks a mere Viscountess, knows with all her entitlement that she has the right to her love. I was utterly convinced of her nastiness.

Kate Hosking performs the role of the Baroness of Inverness, the naive new wife of her Baron, with much to learn about love and lust. She is drawn into competition for the heart – or at least

the body – of Narcissa, but can her gentle heart survive the battering of women who see love as a sport, not a joy?

Madeline Hudson is Marcello the maid, the put-upon servant used to being treated badly by her mistress and guests. But unknown to the Viscountess, even if she cared, even the lowest, even the discarded nurse their desires and hurts.

Playwright Sofia Chapman fills her emotion-wringing comedy with wonderfully bad puns, giving us a beautiful look at self-centred lust. There's music, dancing, physical comedy and more, and in the squished-up space of La Mama it works brilliantly.

<http://www.theatrepeople.com.au/untitled-or-the-seat-of-narcissa/>

UNTITLED, OR THE SEAT OF NARCISSA

STEPHANIE COCHRANE — JANUARY 22, 2016

REVIEWER'S RATING: 5 PERFORMANCES 4 COSTUMES 4 SETS

4 LIGHTING 4 SOUND 4 DIRECTION 4 CHOREOGRAPHY 4 STAGE MANAGEMENT

A highly entertaining and hilarious original work by writer-director Sofia Chapman, *Untitled, or the Seat of Narcissa* is ostensibly a lesbian romance – there's desire, seduction, betrayal and the tragic outcomes of such things: a battle, heart ache and death. Yet what Chapman and her stellar cast are also humorously contending – for humour can allow us a certain distance from which to contemplate somewhat sinister or depressing concepts – is the behaviour and reactions of those who entertain and enable narcissists, and whether those who have such a high opinion of themselves can ever truly love another; that self love to the point of self-absorption and solipsism can be fatal for everyone involved.

A Burning Deck Theatre Company Production performed as part of La Mama's Midsummer Festival Season, the work originated from Sofia's poetry games with friends, which led to the emergence of her alter ego – the Baroness of Inverness (played superlatively by Kate Hosking). The script is fast-paced, hilarious and witty; its entertainment factor multiplied when combined with dance, music, physical theatre, slapstick and at times pathos. The cast are energetic and talented: Kate Hosking as the Scottish poet Baroness of Inverness had the audience cackling with comic delivery and timing of her poems and lines alike. Another highlight is Madeline Hudson as the maid and musician Marcello, with her hilarious facial expressions and one-liners (it certainly is a happy twist for viewers when the two most likeable characters end up together!). Penny Larkins plays the role of Viscountess Narcissa with an overwhelming presence

and beautiful singing voice; Erica Chestnut is well cast as the possessive Duchess of Dullcote, or “The Butcher” (because she is more butch). The musical score features original compositions by Sofia Chapman, folk songs, as well as Madeline Hudson’s sinister cello theme and somewhat strangled Scottish humming.

The narrative follows Narcissa’s search for her “Grand Amour”, alongside the other ladies’ battles for her attention and affection. And yet, as the audience could have predicted (like any Greek tragedy), no one could steal her heart away from herself. Like the original tragedy of Narcissus, before dying she sees her own image in the water and realises her greatest love is herself. Too much self love – an inability to see past one’s own reflection – does not end in happiness. For the Baroness however, initially riddled with a lack of self-worth and self-awareness, in her journey of falling for Narcissa reaches a newfound level of self-satisfaction from which she can find happiness and real affection with another. Too much self love and one cannot find love outside of oneself; not enough and one is bound to fall for another via the self-destructive route of lust and projection.

Many argue that social media reflects and amplifies our culture’s growing levels of narcissism – that platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat offer the narcissist’s reflecting pool: a limitless quarry of prospective followers and admirers. And with the current popularity of “Selfies” in particular (perhaps the pinnacle of the passive narcissism and self-indulgence facilitated by social media) this play’s message is poignant: if the only way one cultivates self-worth is through others’ substantiation and validation – which is usually short-lived – in the long-run we may feel shallow and empty inside. We may not die like Narcissa, but we might not be able to find a true relationship that is not based on the image we project to the world. And should you find yourself in the throngs of an infatuation with such an individual who might have such a need for admiration and an exaggerated sense of self-importance, take Marcello’s advice and run. She might not be there to hum as you flee, but someone more authentic and humble like her might be there to show you real intimacy

Untitled, or the Seat of Narcissa is running at La Mama Theatre, from 19-31

Audience reviews:

'Not only a good story-teller but also a suspense maker, so talented I had to hold my breath till the end.' Eya Koubakji

'It reminds me what I like about the theatre.' Aleksandra Lane

'Every laugh ... is sacred! OR, ... is worth at least one hour of therapy ...' Jane Belfrage

'Bravo! beautiful and witty and silly and deep and extremely entertaining. The Grand Amour! Oh but how our hearts ache for this lonely pursuit! A masterpiece. And a very nice couch!' - Taegen Hannah

'Loved every moment of this show - brilliant witty script, and top actresses and production. Looking forward to your next creation.' - Pamela Lloyd

'Bloody great work, I loved the show. You really did a great job pulling that together. Performers were hilarious!' - Chip Wardale