

Theatre

# Censorship can be fun!

Paul Xuereb

**Porn: the Musical** (MITP) is a very entertaining and quite accomplished work. Malcolm Galea, whose reputation as an actor and as a writer for the stage has grown impressively in recent years, has written a book and a set of lyrics (the latter in conjunction with Boris Cezek and Chris Spiteri) that convert a topic normally viewed as obnoxious by a good many people into one that he presents as an activity that is exceedingly comical.

The musical is also a good-humoured satire on stage censorship, far removed in spirit from the ponderous screeds of the many libertarians who have mushroomed all over the press and the media.

This is not a show to which I would advise readers to take their charismatic neighbours as a treat on their wedding anniversary, but I suspect that most theatre-goers, and not just the under-30s who seemed to make up most of the audience on the night I saw the show, will enjoy it, even those who may wince at the frequent sprinkling of four-letter words and words descriptive of the anatomy.

The show is so good-humoured and the characters, though mostly of the type many people in their daily life would avoid inviting to their children's First Communion celebrations, seem to take their activity with such professional seriousness that one can gratefully suspend one's disbelief and take them to heart as old buddies.

In his book, Galea, who has also directed the show, has built on technical and financial weaknesses and made them his strengths. Maybe, as someone has suggested to me, Galea has learned a good lesson or two from the West End musical *By Jeeves*, a highly successful minimalist musical. He has only seven actors but rather more characters, so he not only uses old-fashioned doubling of parts, but also makes one of his actors - Toni Attard, now revealed as a highly skilful comic -riter of the skimpily written and numerous little roles he has to play,



The scenes where sex scenes are being filmed for the movie take place behind a screen labelled "censored". Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

and appeal for mercy to Galea, who wears a third hat (apart from the non-metaphorical one on his head) as the falsely apologetic Narrator, and for sympathy to the audience. One of the funniest moments is when Attard feels he has had too much: he will not also play an old woman, and this time he wins!

Again, the set is so minimalistic as to threaten absolute disappearance, but here again Galea achieves more theatrical effects than if he had had an elaborate set or a series of sets on a revolve. This is 'poor theatre' that glories in its poverty.

Perhaps, however, the best hits are made by Galea's poking fun at stage censorship simply by wallowing in it. In a scene where the show's anti-hero Stefan (Max Dingli) is finally persuaded to strip to the buff in preparation for performing in a porn movie, and is joined by a trio of dancing gays also in the buff, all four actors wear a solid contraption round their waist clearly labelled 'Censored' and the scenes where sex scenes are being filmed for the movie take place behind a screen also labelled 'Censored' above which we are allowed to see just the

head, shoulders and arms of the porn actors. Sound effects are also featured.

The fact that there is nothing near absolute nudity by any of the performers while at same time we are being fed information that sex is actually taking place is, as readers can expect, highly rib-tickling.

**"Toni Attard's gallery of minor parts is surely one of the show's major assets"**

The plot is simple. Stefan, on the eve of his marriage to Jade (Trinity Fava), his lover, learns she has been unfaithful to him, and leaves in despair for the United States where his naivety and a lucky encounter with Sanddy, a porn star (Suzanne Wadge) leads to his being given a role in a porn movie directed by the great master of film porn Martin

Scoresleazy (geddit?) played by Louis Cassar, who sings sonorously and tunefully like Howard Keel and even looks a little like him.

Stefan and Sanddy soon hit it off and their sex on camera goes very well until it transpires that Stefan, Sanddy and the star of the show, Dr Johnny Long (David Ellul) are all suffering from a sexually transmitted disease, the fault apparently being Sanddy's. In a culture where morality is not discussed, infecting a partner sexually is the only mortal sin.

Shooting is suspended according to law, and Stefan goes back to Malta in despair and there discovers he had been infected by his former girl, Jade. He wants to make up for the harm he has done by proposing on the phone to Scoresleazy that the quarantine imposed in the US for filming the movie does not apply in Malta, and persuades him to do the rest of the shooting in Malta, but he has a great tiff with Sanddy when she finds out that she has been innocent all along. Naturally, there has to be a happy ending, and the show ends with a parody of panto endings: the audience is asked to go home and have their own fun and games there.

A musical needs a good musical score, and even here the show scores well. (Terrible pun! Shame on me). Spiteri and Cezek have written a good series of pieces in a variety of styles, some sounding vaguely Webber-Douglasish, one very strongly country-and-Western (sung very well by Wadge's Sanddy) and others in vaguely familiar styles I am certainly not competent to label.

The cast on the whole sang very competently and sometimes better, but I fear Fava needs to do something about vocal pitch which at times went rather badly off, the night I saw the show.

The funny lyrics get some good, rumbustious music. Even Attard is allowed to express his predicament in music in the song, *Plight of the Miscellaneous Man*, and sings it very much in the right style, as if to the manner born. Attard's gallery of minor parts is surely one of the show's major assets.

Galea's direction is very strong on comic timing, and it is this that gets many a roar from the audience. Max Dingli, with his rueful face and black-rimmed spectacles, looks like one of Woody Allen's relatives, and he is a natural comic who can get a laugh and audience sympathy in quick succession.

The show may not quite be built round this character, but a weaker actor and singer in this part would have sunk the show.

Louis Cassar may have gone over the top in one or two scenes of comic despair, but his Scoresleazy is richly comical both in his comic business and with his rich baritone singing, he is the best singer in the show. David Ellul does not have to do much acting as Dr Johnny Long whose Ph.D. is not doctoral and even less philosophical. He is, in fact, the stud of the show, and he is only sad when the terrible infection makes him very weak where it matters most...

Wadge and Fava still have to learn a thing or two about acting but they are never disturbingly weak, Wadge in particular has some very good moments and both are always easy on the eye.

I thought Spiteri's band and the backing vocalists did very well for themselves.

# EVERYTHING

# €4

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Pull and Bear

ZINETI Bershka

Gradivarius

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