

# The Mathematics of Longing

## *Stage Whispers* review by Kiesten McCauley

Written by Suzie Miller. Co-created by Todd MacDonald, Suzie Miller, Ngoc Phan, Kate Harman, Gavin Webber and Merlynn Tong. Presented by La Boite, The Farm and The Uncertainty Principle. La Boite Roundhouse Theatre, 02 – 23 June, 2018

*The Mathematics of Longing* is a profoundly beautiful, meaningful experience. It seamlessly combines art, science, mathematics, drama, physics, music and dance. The result is a unique theatrical experience. The show's text intertwined with physical theatre, explores the biggest of the big issues to the point where one feels smarter from having sat in observation in the darkened Roundhouse Theatre.

This is a play that puts life and the universe into perspective through the lens of a tender love story. A plethora of major scientific theories and mind-blowing discoveries - string theory, gravitational waves, entanglement (aka spooky action at a distance), Newtonian laws, the vastness of the universe, dark matter, multiverses and more – provide the foundation for the narrative.

It's wonderful to see how cleverly Suzie Miller has connected our human emotional experiences and the characters' journeys with the laws of physics. It's notable too, the play also delves into the observer effect, which takes on an extra level of meaning when one is an audience member; the result is Brechtian to the nth degree.

The characters' love stories, wonderfully acted by Todd MacDonald, Suzie Miller, Ngoc Phan, Kate Harman and Gavin Webber, occur as timelines of the same people in different universes. Anyone who saw *Constellations* at Queensland Theatre might be familiar with this style of storytelling. *The Mathematics of Longing*, however, uses a more simultaneous, focus swapping, integrated flow and has less of that Mamet-esque staccato style used in *Constellations*.

Kate Harman and Gavin Webber's primary disciplines are in dance and physical work, while Todd MacDonald, Suzie Miller, Ngoc Phan and Merlynn Tong come from an acting background. To even a critical eye, they all rise to the challenge of one another's skillsets. The dancers can *really* act and the actors know how to move with precision and grace. Add in live science experiments and the wonderful musical moments and one can't help but be impressed by the performers' skills.

Ross Manning's set design is simple, geometric, modern art staircases that would make Keith from *Grand Designs* weak at the knees; three exposed beams with white lights under the wooden steps leading to a heavenly central platform. Ben Hughes' lighting is outstanding, particularly with the tricky spotlight sequences at the top of the show. The lighting that's hung by the performers during the show is so magical (while also demonstrating cause and effect) it would be easy to just sit and watch that in action for a while.

This is a director-less show; instead all creatives have a say in the show's direction. Somehow it feels as if all of the performers' ideas have come together, like atoms joining together to make molecules, then make compounds, on so on it has gone until we see before us this beautiful new creation. The entire cast and crew breathe life into the big, meaningful theories that are meant to help define life itself. I defy anyone to see this show and not be captivated by it, changed by it and deeply moved by it.

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