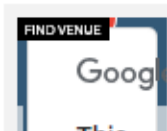


Casanova Dreaming

Mon 6th – Sat 25th August 2018

TIME OF THE NEXT PERFORMANCE: 14:15

VENUE: theSpace @ Niddry Street



REVIEWS

**Marie-Louise Wohrle**

at 09:42 on 12th Aug 2018



0 AGREES

0 DISAGREES

'Casanova Dreaming' is an interesting experience. The idea behind the plot is that a young Giacomo Casanova is visited in his dream by his older self; a plot twist that by the time it is revealed is no longer a plot twist. Older Casanova, who goes by Jack or officially Chevalier de Seingalt, is there to introduce a wealth of characters that featured in the real Casanova's life. Their appearances range in length from a few sentences to bigger scenes of the show, the former often feeling like fillers. From a barber who delights in making money from treating STDs (kindly spread by Casanova), to a very flirtatious nun, a Yorkshire soldier, or the French Marquise d'Urfé, Martin Foreman uses much of Casanova's autobiography to write 'Casanova Dreaming'.

The show features a lot of shallow, pretentious quotations of "wisdom", which I found incredibly annoying as time went on. Life is "always a performance, even if we consider ourselves to be alone", a flirtatious nun informs us; and Old Casanova imparts "men are slaves to passion", as well as "youth can and age knows". Every so often the writing delves into double entendres – "but youth can all night long" – which at least the middle-aged women in the audience enjoyed. This is probably fair deuce in a Casanova show, but could be executed far more cleverly than it is. The actors sadly didn't save the script either, though some of them tried their best. Sadly, performers are inconsistent in their accents and characters, and some performances appear wooden.

'Casanova Dreaming' tries to tell an intriguing story, but sadly didn't manage to grasp my interest for long. The use of tech seems random to some degree: while the lights work for the show, sound effects were used so rarely, and in such odd places, that they seem jarring and out of place. There is also a scene of rape, which is narrated away by some faux semi-wisdoms, while the clear objectification of women is apparent in both young and old Casanovas' mindsets. This could be excused by historical accuracy, but though the script attempts to provide a clever commentary on Casanova's life, I'd expect more than a few pretentious phrasings.

AGREE

DISAGREE

**Charlie Norton**

at 09:46 on 12th Aug 2018



0 AGREES

0 DISAGREES

A more accurate title for this show would have been 'Casanova Nightmare'. Arbery Productions' 50-minute sequence of unexplained characters, nostalgic reflections and misogynistic musings about love and gender is disorientating and aggressively fast-paced.

Perhaps this is to be expected considering the premise of the play. Writer and director Martin Foreman ambitiously derives inspiration from the 18th century autobiography of the notorious venetian Lothario Giacomo Casanova, attempting to encapsulate the breadth of his conquests and other life experiences in a short period of time. The interactions depicted are paired with lectures from the Chevalier de Seingalt, who attempts to awaken Casanova to the error of his ways.

Foreman broaches the challenges of the material by framing the succession of events as a dream. Though this enables structural liberties – interactions do not have to follow a linear format – there is a distinct lack of plot. Throughout the play the significance of the characters who have randomly appeared in Casanova's bedroom is unclear. Ironically, the only identity that is meant to be shrouded in mystery, that of the Chevalier de Seingalt, is obvious from the outset.

A major downfall of 'Casanova Dreaming' is the incredibly reductive portrayal of women. None of the female characters stray from the virgin-whore dichotomy and are consistently oversexualised, objectified and belittled. Whilst these offensive presentations are thinly veiled as an attempt to capture the sexist zeitgeist of the 18th century, there is no care taken to present misogyny as a problem. Rather, the show seems to be an excuse to stage gratuitous tonguing, groping and sex. Most troublingly, an incident of sexual assault is depicted onstage in an extremely thoughtless manner and with no explanation. It is difficult to see how these roles appealed to the generally competent female actors.

The cast were passable in their handling of the script: five actors were required to perform a collective fourteen roles in quick succession. Some order is brought to the chaos by the mysterious figure of the Chevalier de Seingalt, who acts as a sort of conductor of the dream. Creighton King takes on this role with some sense of this responsibility, providing a vague backbone to the show with his sturdy characterisation. As the only other omnipresent character and the titular lead, Giacomo Casanova is expected to show some emotional development throughout the show. Patrick Bergamo unfortunately fails to deliver, though this is potentially due to the one-dimensional nature of the script.

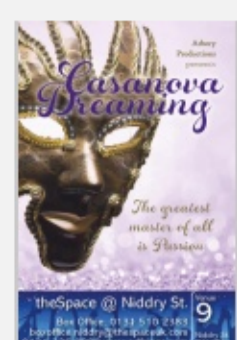
Overall, 'Casanova Dreaming' fails to make any original points about love and mortality due to the volume of interactions crammed into the show. The script mainly consists of tired aphorisms – "your youth will not last" – and fails to provide fleshed out characters. I sincerely hope that thought will be given to the depiction of women if this play is taken further than the Fringe.

AGREE

DISAGREE

Audience Avg.

0 votes, 2 comments



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Comments

**Martin Foreman**; 14th Aug 2018; 10:20:42

Thanks for taking the time to come to and review Casanova Dreaming. Can you take a little more time to read a few comments?

Firstly, Marie-Louise, there is no plot twist - if the audience does not realise very quickly who the old man is, they will not understand the play. Secondly, older Casanova is Jacques, not Jack - pronounced differently but I accept that audiences may not hear the difference. Thirdly, "youth can all night long" is not a double entendre: it is clear that the statement refers only to sex. Fourthly, by "fair deuce" I presume you mean "fair dues".

Incidentally I would have liked to know which performers were inconsistent with their accents (two are not native English speakers). And rather than being told some performances were wooden, I personally prefer when reviewers praise those who act well and ignore those who do not.

Finally, I wondered about the phrase "which at least the middle-aged women enjoyed". It sounded like a sneer. You are aware, of course, that one day you will be middle-aged and the young will sneer at you. The middle-aged of course, expect the young to sneer and wait for them to mature.

Charlie, thank you for my first one-star review. It has been interesting to read your reaction to the play. I regret that you were under the impression that the identity of the older Casanova was meant to be unclear - if the audience isn't aware who he is after the first few minutes they are not paying attention. The fact that Seingalt knows all the women who are in Giacomo's future is an Important Clue.

Your main concern is the portrayal of women. To some extent, that is not surprising; we live in a society that is increasingly aware of inequalities between men and women, issues of sexual assault and discrimination of various forms throughout society. However, that is not my topic in Casanova Dreaming; many other plays at the Fringe examine these issues and probably in greater depth and more insights than I am capable of.

Should I at least have imposed our 21st perspective on the 18th century? In writing the play I made a conscious decision not to do so, because otherwise I would have given a false picture of the man and his time. I wanted the audience to watch the play as life was, not how it should have been. The virgin/whore dichotomy you refer to has some truth in it, but it is reductive and blinkers us to the more nuanced view of sexuality - male and female - that prevailed in the 1700s. By using different women who had all come across Casanova in his time and had very different attitudes to him, to life in general and to their own status, I tried to reveal some of that nuance and to indicate that while some women were forced by social convention into situations they might not want, others used social convention to achieve their goals. In your case, I obviously failed to make my point.

The scene of sexual assault (I assume you refer to the near-rape, although from a 21st century perspective many of the incidents in the play, including women's groping of Casanova, could also be considered sexual assault) was chosen to illustrate the conflict between Casanova's sexual drive and his respect (from his perspective) for women. And yes, it has been discussed in great depth by the cast and each of the women who portray her in different performances does so in full understanding and consent in the role. When offered the chance to opt out, none of them wished to do so.

Casanova Dreaming is not a critique of modern society, nor even the 18th century. It is no more than the portrait of a man - a fascinating, complex and ultimately unhappy man - at a time that is now remote to us. The inhabitants of his dream should not be taken as anything other than symbols of events and people in his life. (You accuse me of giving an incredibly reductive portrayal of women. It would have been fairer to say I gave a reductive portrayal of every man and woman in the play except Casanova.) If you had come to the play with that perspective, rather than imposing your vision of what the play ought to be, you might have enjoyed it more.

Thanks again to you both for coming to Casanova Dreaming. I am sorry you did not enjoy it and I hope you get more pleasure from other productions at the Fringe than you did from ours.

Martin Foreman - writer/director

**J Horner**; 17th Aug 2018; 11:29:49

I agree entirely with your response to your reviewers, the first reviewer lost all credibility with their comment relating to middle aged women. Resorting to scoffing at a gender biased stereo-type renders the rest of the review meaningless. I suggest that the 'middle-aged women' put aside the 50+ years of their own feminism undertaken on behalf of future generations of women, at the door.

Your second reviewer also jumps on the gender bandwagon and poses the question as to why the female cast would choose to accept the roles they play. Again, credibility for the review was lost as it is so apparent that the reviewer did not consider the freedom of choice that the actors had in choosing to be part of the production. Was the reviewer trying to suggest a Weinstien-esq situation had occurred with poor downtrodden girls so desperate to perform that they were willing to participate in a production and take on roles that were reductive to themselves in a production they didn't believe in? What an incredibly retrograde view of female cast members.

I further agree that neither reviewer was in the least bit perturbed by the female groping of Casanova and, in my opinion, watched the performance with a very one dimensional perspective.

The play itself was complex and fast paced and required one to pay attention, that the cast managed to handle the frequent change of character so credibly is a credit to them all. The play has no 'message', no point to make, no political agenda, it did not seek to make a social comment on gender equality in the 21st Century indeed it seemed to me to simply be the story of an unhappy and confused man of his time. It is a pity that neither reviewer was able to apply some context to the script.

I applaud you for an interesting production and especially the opportunity for the each of the cast to showcase so many roles in one production. It was a generous piece of writing.

This play is not a 'safe space' and I applaud you for that.

Well done.

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