

# Love lives intertwine in The Company Theatre's seductive production



Photo by Shaun Benson

Think of it as six degrees of separation, and all of the characters are connected by one common object—a mysterious stiletto shoe. This stylish accessory is at the heart of Australian playwright Andrew Bovell's *Speaking In Tongues*, a dramatic thriller about four marriages that fall into a mess of sex, lies and neglect, now playing at the Berkeley Street Theatre. Presented by The Company Theatre in association with Canadian Stage, this complex, maze-like play follows the parallel lives of nine different people played by a cast of four talented performers: Yanna McIntosh, Richard Clarkin, Jonathan Goad and Helene Joy.

The opening scene takes place in a hotel room, where two married couples are about to commit acts of infidelity with their respective lovers. Sonja (McIntosh) and Peter (Clarkin) weigh the consequences of this decision at the same time as Leon (Goad) and Jane (Joy)—mirroring each other and speaking their lines at the same time. Then, the creative set (by designer John Thompson) flips around to reveal a living room where a confession sequence unfolds between Sonja and Leon, and Peter and Jane, in which the truth comes out and the husbands and wives are torn apart by anger and jealousy. Later their lives become entangled further when Leon strikes up a conversation with Peter in a bar, and Sonja meets Jane on the dance floor at a night club.

But just when we think we understand where the plot is going, three more chance encounters divert our attention and take us in a completely different direction. If the first act is about togetherness, whether that be in love or lust, the second act is all about the individual, and what it means to be alone and distanced from relationships. The set is stripped down, and the characters divided, each occupying their own separate corners of the stage.

Here, we meet Valerie (McIntosh), an emotionally fragile clinical therapist who goes missing one night when her car breaks down on the side of the road; Nick (Goad), Jane and Peter's neighbour accused of harming the missing Valerie in act one; John, Valerie's concerned husband, and Neil, a borderline stalker obsessed with an old love affair (both played by Clarkin); as well as Sarah (Joy), a callous commitment-phobe and Valerie's patient. Each of the nine characters' lives touch in one way or other, their stories coming together in a startling conclusion that will keep you guessing long after the curtain call.

*Speaking in Tongues* is a well-paced, artfully staged production with effective sound and lighting design. Director Philip Riccio gets exciting performances out of the tight-knit cast, all of whom reach their full potential in the second act, owning Bovell's challenging script and its wide range of emotions. Another engaging and thought-provoking offering from The Company Theatre.