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# Speaking in Tongues Reveals Love's Layers

THE COMPANY THEATRE TACKLES A WELL-CRAFTED SCRIPT THAT EXPOSES FOUR MARRIAGES ON THE BRINK AND THE TRAGIC LINKS THAT TIE THEM.



Photo by Shaun Benson

Interweaving tales of lust, lies, and deceit make for some juicy storytelling on both the stage and screen. What's fascinating about Andrew Bovell's *Speaking in Tongues*, which deals with similar themes, is how it uses its live presentation to do things movies can't.

Despite only presenting one production a year, The Company Theatre never fails to choose a challenging script from an edgy international playwright. In a co-production with Canadian Stage, this time Company is bringing one of Australia's most exciting voices to Toronto with a dark, smouldering production that follows four troubled marriages connected by a woman gone missing. Each individual couple's story is fairly straightforward, but Bovell masterfully lays them on top of each other to create a compelling mystery.

At first, he does this quite literally. Two separate scenes occur simultaneously inside the same hotel room, each between a man and women who met at the bar downstairs and who are about to commit an extramarital affair. But these two couples share not only the same space and intent, but also the same dialogue. The two men and women simultaneously speak their lines, often word for word, with subtle changes that highlight different interpersonal dynamics. One couple follows through, the other doesn't, but before things get too *Sliding Doors*-y, the

style breaks into a more traditional two-hander between the spouses, revealing yet more layers: Jane (Helene Joy) slept with Leon (Jonathan Goad), Leon is married to Sonja (Yanna McIntosh), Sonja almost slept with Peter (Richard Clarkin), and Peter is married to Jane.

From that point on, each couple follows a similar path to a very different end, with some shakeups along the way—including the fact that while their spouses were cooling off away from home, Jane and Leon each experienced a different traumatic encounter, raising themes of disappearance, love, death, and shoes. In the second act, the actors leave Jane, Peter, Leon, and Sonja behind and take up new characters, transforming the play into a film noir-style mystery done mostly through monologue.

This change in tone, the overlapping dialogue, the slow reveal of twist after twist, and the intricate weaving of stories are all signs confirming Bovell—a successful writer in theatre, film, and TV (his screenplays include *Strictly Ballroom* and *Edge of Darkness*)—knows how to use the strengths of this art form. Even though the surprises in the latter half of the play can be spotted miles away, and the set and lighting design from John Thompson comes off a little heavy-handed at times, the cast, as well as director Philip Riccio, prove themselves more than capable of bringing the writer's words to life.