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# Dispatches from The Fringe - A lukewarm Love and Understanding lacks fire

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Love and Understanding  
*Wield the Matter*

## Love and Understanding

Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Rachel and Neal's relationship has stagnated. Into their lives Neal's old friend Richie arrives, a roughish manipulator who throws their relationship into disarray with painful consequences. Joe Penhall's 1997 play, *Love and Understanding* is a dark comedy that explores themes of fidelity, betrayal and friendship. Underscored by sharp and incisive dialogue, it oozes with sexual energy. And here lies the problem with director Max Upton's production: despite some terrific talent on display, there just isn't any sexual energy, tension or chemistry to be found.

The problem is one of casting, where the sum of the strong, individual parts do not add up to a cohesive whole. Ben Kavanagh, a confident and talented performer, looked badly miscast as the pivotal character Richie, looking too camp to be predatory, too bitchy to be dangerous and incredibly uncomfortable during love scenes. The equally talented Will Attenborough as Neal looked slightly more at ease, but he too looked uncomfortable, particularly with the plays sexual undercurrent. Not even the inclusion of a copy of *Shades of Grey* during a bedroom scene could raise the sexual temperature. Only Charlie Hamblin as Rachel managed to generate the requisite

sexual sparks on occasion, delivering a well-pitched and well rounded performance. But sparks were quickly extinguished and the sexual tension never rose above that of people awkwardly trying to kiss for the first time.

In many respects this production of *Love and Understanding* is a triumph of determination over adversity with set and costume changes, on a stage barely the size of a closet, deftly and professionally handled. Upton kept things moving, there were some fine moments and a strong performance by Hamblin provided the glue that held this ambitious, if miscast production together.

*Love and Understanding* runs daily at Caquila, Venue 21 until August 27th. Doors open at 5.55 p.m. Admission is £10.50



**Chris O'Rourke**  
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