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Is After Miss Julie a bridge too far for Odeum Theatre Company?

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In her program notes for *After Miss Julie*, director Billie Sue Thompson states that she desires to "reveal with honesty the deeply complex struggles, erotic compulsions and powerful chemistry in the relationships driving these antagonists toward a believable tragic ending." If these are the standards against which this production is to be measured then, regrettably, this production falls disappointingly short of achieving its own expressed ambitions.

Patrick Marber's *After Miss Julie*, presented by Odeum Theatre Company and currently running at the [Tulsa Performing Arts Center](#), is essentially a retelling of August Strindberg's 1888 play, *Miss Julie*. Relocated to England in 1945 just after the Labour Party are elected to government, we find the eponymous Miss Julie struggling to live between two worlds, both of which she desires and fears, being both repelled and attracted by John, her father's chauffeur who is engaged to Christine, Miss Julie's maid servant. As their relationships intertwine all three are propelled towards a course of action which results in tragic consequences.

Like Hedda Gabbler or Ophelia, Miss Julie is an iconic female character that places great demands on any actress. Whilst Cassie Hollis is to be commended for attempting the role (and for producing the most authentic English accent), she struggled uncomfortably to convey the innocence, vulnerability, intense sexuality and struggle that define Miss Julie. Will Carpenter as John was slightly more believable, due in part to his commanding physical presence, but the obvious lack of chemistry between himself and Hollis rendered the sexually charged scenes awkward and their entire relationship questionable. Sara Cruncleton, as the maid servant Christine, gradually came to inhabit her character much more convincingly, giving the most satisfying performance overall.

Throughout, the actors, particularly Hollis, appear to have been badly served by the director. All too often the pace felt rushed and they seemed unclear, or unconvinced, as to what exactly they were meant to be doing. Consequently, so too were the audience. A pivotal scene near the end when Miss Julie begins to finally lose complete touch with reality left the audience laughing rather

than empathizing or even sympathizing. As a result the end, when it finally comes, is neither convincing nor realistic.

In keeping with the plays Naturalistic styling, Erin Scarberry's excellent set design authentically captured the atmosphere of a servants work quarters, wherein all the action takes place. However, the setting of the theater space into a triangular shape (two rows of seats set in a v shape against the stage) resulted in the actors often being masked to the audience and crucial actions being rendered invisible.

While Odeum are to be admired for tackling challenging pieces, in *After Miss Julie*, the sense of a company swimming out of their depth and of a director unable to deliver on their own promises are unfortunately the strongest impression made upon the audience. Which is disappointing for Odeum are an ambitious company and Billie Sue Thompson is an experienced director. Both are extremely capable of delivering a much better production than this.

After Miss Julie runs at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center till November 14th. Check venue for exact times.



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