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Identity crisis loom large in a troubled "After Miss Julie"

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Prime Cut Productions

After Miss Julie by Patrick Marber produced by Prime Cut Productions

Rating: ★★★★★

As the party rages, an upper class, virginal, sex kitten, all petulance and pouting with a penchant for S&M, goes slumming with the servants on VE Day, 1945. A coquettish, spoiled, Daddy's girl, more child than woman, the recently dumped Julie likes to toy with the boys and be toyed with, seeming to switch easily between being dominated and giving the orders. She meets her match when she toys with Daddy's chauffeur John, an inverted snob and former soldier, with a strong sense of his own importance and a weak chest. His sort of fiancé Christine, the house cook, is sort of morally upright and sort of a good girl, or so it would seem. When all three come together over one memorable night class, power, sex, gender, madness, abuse, Northern Ireland landlords and whatever you're having yourself all lend their weight to this troubled production. In trying to be all

things to all people, Prime Cut Productions' reimaging of Patrick Marber's 'After Miss Julie,' itself a reimaging of August Strindberg's 1888 classic 'Miss Julie,' suffers as big an identity crisis as its central character, despite showing some fine moments on occasion.

Written in 1995, Marber's reimaging of Strindberg's classic shifts the action to a big house outside London on the occasion of the Labour Party's first major landslide victory in July 1945. The obvious impact of this significant political shift on class relations provided an informed context against which Marber explored themes of class, power and gender. In contrast, Prime Cut Productions shifting of the action to VE Day 1945 in a big house in Fermanagh serves to add yet another layer to Marber's already richly layered text. But one not fully developed or explored and which programme notes don't do enough to inform, justify or salvage. Outside of some credible, but consistently dropped Northern Irish accents, the Northern story it aspires to tell is just not there on the stage.

What is there on stage is one incredibly detailed set design by Sarah Bacon. Meticulously and lovingly attended to, Bacon's retro kitchen plays as much a role as its three central characters in conveying 'After Miss Julie's' sense of time and atmosphere. As does Ciaran Bagnall's evocative lighting design, which adds texture and layers of depth to compliment Bacon's detailed set. But if the stage was impeccable, the staging wasn't always what it might have been. Director Emma Jordan contrasted some strong with some curious choices, with lots of circling the table and walking across the stage for the weakest of reasons.

But Jordan was on the money with her casting, even if there does appear to be a palpable tension onstage, and not in a good way. Pauline Hutton as the cook Christine was convincing throughout, even if she didn't always look comfortable smoking. Ciaran McMeniman as John, the aspiring wannabe with ideas above his station is equally convincing. As is Lisa Dwyer Hogg as spoiled, rich kid Julie, constantly circling or climbing across the table, wanting to look all prowling panther, all damaged and erotic, but more often than not resembling a kitten craving affection. All well and good, but at times 'After Miss Julie' elevates itself into something other than just convincing and becomes utterly compelling for a spell. On occasion a wonderful synergy is achieved between the personal, political, psychological and sexual and something powerful is crafted, most notably between John and Julie during the final scene. But there's just not enough, and just not often enough.

Feeling at times like 'Downton Abbey' meets 'Fifty Shades,' flip flopping uneasily between its various themes and lacking a central cohesion, 'After Miss Julie' falls short too often of its own aspirations. But one suspects there's an amazing show lying just below the surface waiting to get out. One sincerely hopes it does for when it shines, you really wanted more.

'After Miss Julie' by Patrick Marber, produced by Prime Cut Productions runs at The Project Arts Centre until March 19th before going on tour nationally.

For more information, visit [The Project Arts Centre](#)



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