

'I do' hijinks pasta point of no return

BEVERLEY BROMMERT

THIS chronicle of aborted nuptials is the ideal vehicle for Paul Slabolepzy's distinctive brand of theatre, in which drama and comedy have equal shares.

A reluctant bride, a volatile father, an ineffectual mother, an unreliable groom, and an array of hen-witted secondary characters combine to maximise chaos in the pre-wedding arrangements.

The year is 1994, dawn of South Africa's new democracy, and everything is ripe for change – including the circumstances of Salvatore Fiore, whose daughter's expedient marriage to a certain Giorgio will enable him to give up his less-than-prosperous trattoria and return to his native Italy.

Alas, the course of his project, like true love, does not run smooth, and from dodgy amplification to the truculence of the bride Victoria, not to mention ancillary problems like a shooting and the non-delivery of promised money, the wedding day evolves steadily into an event from hell.

A strong vein of farce drives the action, so timing is of the essence to maintain momentum as characters enter and exit; the pace is hectic and there is a laugh-a-minute.

Although the bride and her parents form the leads, this is an ensemble piece with succulent roles for the entire cast, which makes for a richly-layered slice of characterisation – unlike the fashionably low-fat wedding cake.

Graham Hopkins is convincing as the irascible, coarse-grained Salvatore, offering a well-rounded portrayal with just a hint of caricature.

The same is true of Anthea

MY LOW-FAT, ALMOST ITALIAN WEDDING

DIRECTOR: Roy Sargeant
CAST: Graham Hopkins, Anthea Thompson, Hannah Borthwick
VENUE: Artscape Arena
UNTIL: January 4
RATING: ★★★★★

Thompson in the role of Mavis, the bride's mother: her reading of the persona is suitably nuanced to strike a balance between sympathy and antipathy.

Hannah Borthwick, as the edgy Victoria, confirms her growing reputation for plausible and intelligent characterisation.

The assorted talents of comedian James Cairns (Clyde, Salvatore's simple-minded brother-in-law), Mark Elderkin (Joey, the foul-mouthed protégé of Salvatore) and Nhanhla Mkhwanazi (Alpheus, Salvatore's enterprising servant) provide consistently strong back-up to the leads' performance, with an engaging cameo from Murray Steyn as Father Sullivan.

Roy Sargeant's cohesive direction ensures unanimity of calibre.

Act Two is darker-toned than the manic first act, touching on socio-political issues rather than confining itself to a pre-nuptial comedy of errors in the build-up to a turbulent, if somewhat glib, finale.

This does not affect the prevailing good-humoured zaniness of the play, however, and all is sweetness and light by the time the lights go out on Alfred Rietmann's meticulously crafted set. Audience entertainment remains the cornerstone of Slabolepzy's cheery new comedy.