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Le Mariage

David Lescot, translated by Ruth Bey

Cherub Theatre Company

Arcola Theatre

(2008)

Review by [Anita-Marguerite Butler](#)



Publicity image

'Teach me your language...I don't understand you but I will listen', says woman to man in a story concerning their shared language (French) and his language (Arabic), translated seamlessly by Ruth Bey from French to English. Part of the Arcola's summer season, it is presented by The Cherub Company in their mission to encourage non-British works that might otherwise be overlooked.

It is interesting when theatrical form reflects content perfectly: the theatre's Studio 2 (around the corner from the main building, necessitating a brief walk), with an audience capacity of about 40, seems to become the very living room it depicts, adding an intense intimacy to David Lescot's intensely intimate *Le Mariage*, rendering the actors in this two-hander within one's touch.

And touch is pertinent in a play that focuses very much on the five senses as a better form of communication, when language and cultures can so easily misinterpret. Director Michael Gieleta uses sparse staging to present - with pathos and warmth - a marriage of convenience between a Parisian and a North African within an overarching theme of illegal immigration.

As if to emphasise that these are strangers entering into, what should be, the culmination of intimacy, the characters are nameless. Just married, they plan to meet once a month for a year to learn a different 'habit', before a final test of authenticity and citizenship for him; for her, the chance to be someone who does something rather than nothing towards a new 'resistance'. But feelings tend to override the best laid plans.

Twelve vignettes follow, introduced by title (eating, sleeping, etc) projected onto the back wall and punctuated successively by Edward Lewis's emotively expressive sound bites of sea shore and scrambled voices. Particularly strong is 'memories' where, as if an elderly couple looking back, the pair squabble in trying to establish how they 'met' in order to move forwards.

Karim Saleh, 'the man', presents a compelling cocktail of deep desires and smouldering passions, consternation and frustration, at her insistence on dissecting and recording their 'habits' as if for an anatomical experiment; he knows a woman's body from her hand and wrist alone. Though claiming that his skin is his armour, a moment of gut-wrenching honesty displays the simple human need to touch another human's skin.

As 'the woman', Miriam Heard (ethereally beautiful) is totally believable as her genuinely altruistic intentions, and pragmatism in learning about intimacy without getting intimate, begin to crumple, both in the knowledge that the way into her soul is much simpler than she thought, and the realisation that absence can explain so much more than presence.

With top tickets at £15 and pay-as-you-feel Tuesdays, it would be hard to find a more emotionally-packed 80 minutes (no interval) of drama. Forego the contrived shenanigans of *Big Brother* and the drama queens of Wimbledon: until 19 July, humanity in the raw is to be found in a converted East End factory; a reminder, in our hermetically-sealed, air-brushed world, of what theatre was designed to do.



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