



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## THE UNDERPANTS

**University of Adelaide Theatre Guild**

**Little Theatre**

Until 23 May 2009

Review by Jamie Wright

A modern adaptation of Carl Sternheim's 1911 play 'Die Hose' by American actor/comedian Steve Martin, 'The Underpants' is, broadly, a play about women's underwear and the effects it can have on men.

Quiet hausfrau, Louise Maske, experiences a wardrobe malfunction while the King's parade marches by; suddenly, she is a celebrity. However, fame has negative consequences as well as positive ones, and she finds herself the flame for some very odd moths – and the room she and her dim husband Theo wish to let becomes the hottest property in town.

Kate Fraser is excellent as Louise, beginning as the shy, obedient housewife who discovers independent thought and shrugs off her repressed sexuality as she becomes the centre of several obsessions – both wanted and unwanted.

Brant Eustace, sporting a Hitleresque floppy hair-parting, is intense and energetic as the oblivious, bean-counting bureaucrat husband, Theo, and Emily Branford is casually coarse as the interfering upstairs neighbour, Gertrude, who attempts to help foster Louise's sudden awakening.

Christopher Leech is appropriately sweaty, and both disingenuous and then genuine as the lovestruck, hypochondriac barber, Cohen. Tim Heffernan is all nerves and OCD as the scientist, Klingehoff and newsreader Michael Smyth makes a sonorous cameo as 'An Important Visitor.'

The best role in the show, however – and the one which is easiest to see Steve Martin himself playing – is Versati, the amorous poet. A brilliant Matt Scales takes the part and brings everything to it – accent, expression, movement – with hilarious results.

Director John Wells displays a deft touch and a very intelligent interpretation of the joke-laden script - as it would have been easy to sit back, let the farcical elements dominate the show and allow the comedy to be overdone and the actors become nothing more than a delivery system for dialogue. By exercising restraint and exploring the depth and subtlety of the characters, he makes the experience far more satisfying.

A few timing glitches did little to diminish Marcus Cook's effective lighting. and Cassandra Backler's costuming and design helped fuse the comic with the realistic. The only thing which did jar a little was the mix of accents; Versati's, Cohen's and Klingehoff's matched their ethnicity, yet Louise's was stage English and Theo's and Gertrude's Australian.

A bit coarse, often bawdy and even slightly scatological, this is low-brow done well. Put on your best underwear and make your way to the Little Theatre to catch a glimpse of this gem.