



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## PARIS

### Marie Clark Musical Theatre

#### Scott Theatre

Until 2 Aug 2008

Review by Richard Flynn

Marie Clark Musical Theatre has broken from the tried, tired and true. The Adelaide premiere of the English/Mackay Australian rock musical, "Paris", works in the massed numbers, where everybody is still and singing straight out front, but, overall, it is only marginally successful.

There's plenty of good music, but re-writes are still indicated: not the least where scenes end abruptly with little or no connection to what follows. Helen's 'Oh Paris' (with her lover dead in her arms) and the Finale (a reprise of the rousing 'Love Has Power' with everyone ranged across the stage in 'final bow' mode) is perhaps the most obvious example of this faulty construction and direction short on ideas.

Musical director Ben Saunders conducts an impressive twenty-two piece orchestra, but, located somewhere backstage, they have to be miked along with all the singers. His surrendering control to a sound desk operator is a recipe for disaster. In these hi-tech days, technicians should know the score almost as well as the MD – but they obviously don't. In "Paris", most of the time the singers are drowned by the orchestra. And unimaginative speaker-bank placement removes any chance of determining quickly who is singing and from where. But poor sound is not the only culprit.

The lighting operators appear to be working out the plot (by Cory Hawkless and Robert Andrews) as they go along: sudden changes, for no apparent reason; soloists singing in the dark, sometimes lit after they'd been singing for some time, often not at all; follow spots and Vari-lites that miss their marks, are late or wander aimlessly.

Most of these faults can be ironed out as the season unfolds, but the dull, all-purpose set (by Gary Tilling), not helped by the lighting, lacks any creative solutions for changes of location or boats at sea with and without storms – Troy on fire, however, shows promise.

Of the large cast, Menelaus (Ian Muster) gives the standout performance, then Neville Phillis as King Priam. Of the women, Cara Brown (Cassandra) is the best and, though doomed to be ignored, certainly makes her mark. Karin Barker adds strong support as Hecuba. David MacGillivray leads well the younger brigade as callow, love-sick Paris, but some of his music is out of his vocal range. Andrew Pettigrew has more depth and is suitably feisty as Agamemnon, while Tania Savelli (Helen) has a nice voice, but audibility is a frequent problem. Hot-head Achilles (Peter Bevin) postures and fumes, but Stephen Mulady (Ulysses) should protest vigorously at being directed to sing most of his prayer facing upstage. Surely if the gods are everywhere, they can be sitting in the Dress Circle!

Costumes by Mandy Fisher have the 'old white bed sheets' look. Body armour, usually difficult, is more successful, but the battles need more choreographic point to lift them from school playground brawl to significant event in the unfolding drama. Oh for the sound of metal on metal and leather! - though the vigour of the fighting is hard to fault. Hopefully all health insurance premiums are up to date!

Director Jacqui Mulady manages her considerable resources competently, but there are disappointingly few great ideas to lift the production to really exciting levels. "Paris" needs them desperately, otherwise the Professional Cast CD (on sale in the foyer) may be the better option.