

The last hurrah

Kucom's Night Watch will have you at the edge of your seat

KUCOM'S last production in its Shakespeare Street Playhouse opened last night to the intense enjoyment of its old and young audience.

Lucille Fletcher's suspense drama Night Watch played out on two levels – those treading the boards and those reacting so visibly to the machinations of the intrigue.

The theme is one of betrayal; an echo from the playwright's own life. The protagonists juggle for supremacy against a backdrop of deceit and manipulation. The delightful setting is the drawing room of a 1930s Brownstone in Manhattan, which has been remodelled into a luxurious townhouse. The gulf opening up between John and Elaine Wheeler, an erstwhile boat salesman and his Cantwell heiress wife, is symbolised through their accoutrements – hers, an art collection of old masters; his, old sailing trophies. These objects juxtaposition in the otherwise comfortable surroundings, giving a semiotic emphasis to the conflict.

The opening refrain of Frere Jacques' followed by the tolling chimes of a clock becomes a repetition growing ever more ominous throughout the play. Chilling music swirls at certain times, creating further tension, and at the height of the suspense wind rushes through the theatre.

Rowena Marshall as Elaine, wife of John Wheeler, pours her all into her portrayal. The audience adored her. Peter Rosier as her husband, John, brings his enigmatic character to the stage with suitable stiffness and coldness. Bronwyn Grannall's Blanche Cooke, Elaine's dear



Heather MacTavish will direct Kucom's final production, Night Watch, which will run for the next two weeks. PHOTO: LEE CONSTABLE

friend and nurse, performed exactly as the playwright would have her: professional, caring and in charge apparently.

The maid's stolid, storm-trooper role was thumped out enthusiastically by Anne Elliott as the German Helga, bringing rare humorous relief to the action. The audience warmed to Joe Clutterbuck's very pushy, but likeable Curtis Appleby, the inquisitive neighbour. The minor roles supported their star cast.

The costuming was extremely appropriate, especially Elaine Wheeler's, which was outstanding in its style and elegance together with genuine, tasteful jewellery.

As with any thriller, clues are dropped for the keen ear to pick up.

Any discussion of the plot of a suspense thriller in a critique puts a dampener on future audiences' enjoyment. The director and the cast promise that the

denouement will blow attendees away, but they ask that the outcome is not revealed, just as Agatha Christie's Mousetrap is guarded in London. Rarely has this critic seen such intense participation, such enthrallment from an audience.

Heather MacTavish's lifelong dedication to Kucom and the dramatic arts has enabled her, a master puppeteer, to bring Lucille Fletcher's thriller to life.

Her cleverly chosen cast, their enthusiasm, the meticulousness of her stage crew, the sound and lighting effects and charming setting lock into a production which farewells Kucom's Shakespeare Street Playhouse, not with a whimper, but a bang.

Review by Enid Forsyth.
Performances from tonight to December 10, for details and tickets contact the MECC on 4961 9777.