
THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

**State Theatre Company
The Dunstan Playhouse
Until March 19.**

Review by Stephanie Johnson

"The Government Inspector" is a masterpiece of rich and vibrant colours with music, costumes and sets stylishly depicting opulent Russia in the 1800s.

Babushkas and gourd-like lanterns line the front of the stage and the set is designed with richly coloured folk art – a feast for the eyes.

The acting ensemble includes a colourful array of quirky characters in larger than life costumes.

The State Theatre Company's production is a fun-filled farcical evening of impressive proportions and moments of sheer brilliance.

This is also a Russian comedy with a broad Australian influence. The combination is sometimes strangely discordant.

Small town Russian corrupt and incompetent officials hear that a government inspector is coming. They panic and jump to the wrong conclusion that a grandiose visitor is the inspector when in fact he is a hopeless gambler. Nevertheless the "inspector" is showered with praise and money until the truth is eventually revealed.

The scene is set with a strong Russian overtone and yet when the ensemble speaks the façade of Russia crumbles and modern-day Australia barges in. The use of Australian vernacular and topical Adelaide political references is a deliberate ploy. The result is sometimes clever, often humorous and yet sometimes jarring.

The musical ensemble provides some of the brilliant moments as members cleverly mask scene changes with parodies of modern songs such as "I Was Made for Loving You Baby" performed in true traditional Russian folk-song style. Salute music director Philip Griffin!

Director Adam Cook has brought together a strong ensemble of actors who all support each other well, never upstaging but rather providing an artistic frieze effect when not speaking. This adds to the artistry of the production, which is considerable.

Paul Blackwell yet again shines in this style of comedy with his buffoonish inspector Khlestakov while Don Barker pontificates splendidly as the mendacious Mayor.

Jacqy Phillips provides many a humorous moment as the Mayor's wife as she struts the stage in a costume that is pure confectionary and an accent somewhat akin to Kath or Kim. Geoff Revel's Osip the servant is suitably subservient and sly, a strong foil to his upper class counterparts.

Artistic Director Adam Cook has provided a sumptuous comedic feast as the first serving in the State Theatre Company's 2005 subscription season. It is no wonder that, as he claims, this year's subscriptions are soaring.