



Erotic Alleluia

23-27 Apr,

Theatre,

Theatre Reviews

Critics' choice

By Andrew Fuhrmann

An erotic lace-paper valentine in a prologue and three scenes

Federico Garcia Lorca's *The Love of Don Perlimplín and Belisa in the Garden* is a sharp little *navaja* of a play: an attractive, compact piece with a powerful sting, well dealt here by Melbourne's Spanish Theatre Company in a new Spanish-language production. In fact this production is not only *Perlimplín*. The company has also included extracts from other plays of Lorca's early period, taking scenes from *The Sailor* and *Quimera* among others and inserting them between the four "frames" of *Perlimplín*. It's a gamble – sampling from Lorca's juvenilia – but it pays off. The evening has a fine, dream-like drift, from garden to ocean to desert and back to garden, and the resemblances and contrasts between the scenes all compound a single theme: the dangerous transformative potential of desire. *Perlimplín* tells the story of an ageing, virginal bachelor, Perlimplin, convinced by his servant to marry a beautiful and flirtatious young woman, Belisa. It's an unhappy match: on their wedding night she betrays him. But Perlimplin is faithful to a fault, and commits himself to a bloody sacrifice in order to restore the honour – indeed, the very soul – of his young bride.

Lorca said his interest in *Perlimplín* was to underline the contrast between the lyrical and the grotesque, and even to combine the two. Luridly made up, in stylised poses across a dimly-lit set, the large cast negotiate this contrast with a credible sort of enthusiasm. Carmen Ormeño is a standout as the mischievous but ultimately repentant servant: puckish and poetical. Others are not always so impressive – though there is plenty of zeal – but director Iván Rojas shows a light touch when it is needed.

And there is the bonus that it is all in Spanish. The Spanish Theatre Company make good use of the Mechanics Institute's resources with some very professional surtitling. All in all, a stylish production of a rarely seen masterpiece-in-miniature.