

Doesn't skimp on the laughs...

Theresa Smith

METICULOUSLY crafted, this classic French farce will have you laughing at the absurdity of one man's miserly existence.

Translated by director Sylvaine Strike and William Harding (who tackles the role of Harpagon's son) from Molière's original, it sports gorgeous costumes by Sarah Roberts, a striking set and some focused, finely controlled acting.

The two-hour comedy tells the story of rich old moneylender Harpagon (Newton) who wants to marry the much younger Mariane (Ditodi), who likes the old man's foppish son, Cleante (Harding). Harpagon's daughter, the fair Elise (Liquorish), has a thing for Valere (Kani), who is pretending to be the steward, but he's really of noble birth and, wait for it, there's going to be mistaken identity, theft and big reveals.

Toss in a couple of kooky characters like an OTT match-maker only interested in money, servants who don't like their master and really the only thing missing is a dog, because everything else gets thrown in.

This being French farce, movements are exaggerated and heavily stylised – think cartoon on stage if you're not used to the idea – but perfectly delivered on this side

THE MISER

DIRECTOR: Sylvaine Strike
CAST: Lionel Newton, Patricia Boyer, William Harding, Kate Liquorish, Mpho Osei-Tutu, Atandwa Kani, Motlatji Ditodi, Jason Kennett
VENUE: The Flipside Stage, Baxter Theatre Centre
UNTIL: May 25
RATING: ★★★★★

of buffoonery and that side of stagey.

There's also a satirical streak in the material, with characters knowingly (though not literally) winking at the audience when they make the audience complicit to witnessing Harpagon's folly.

The stingy man is so wrapped up in amassing more money and saving what he already has that he misses out on the joy of life playing out right in front of him.

As Harpagon, Newton is intense and focused – no wasted energy for this one, even when he could so easily have hammed it up.

He delivers his lines with clarity and his mobile face goes from in control to mad by the end of the play.

All energy and people revolve around Newton and there's so much action happening all the time that

Lionel Newton and Mpho Osei-Tutu in *The Miser*.



you can lose what is being said if you don't pay attention.

Mpho Osei-Tutu puts those scary bulging eyes of his to good use as a valet, gendarme and some random Arab guy, but Jason Kennett goes

one better as Harpagon's usually silent lackey who makes himself understood just fine.

Patricia Boyer pulls off three roles with style. Ditodi is sweet as Mariane and Kani's diction makes

him very much his father's son.

If you're not into French farce, this is going to seem an overblown, odd exercise, but if you are willing to give it a try, this is a lesson in how it should be done.