

**THEATRE**

**KEY FOR TWO**

**Venue:** PACC Auditorium, Karachi  
**Produced by:** The Old Grammarians' Society

Watching *Key For Two*, the latest production of the Old Grammarians' Society (OGS), evoked a distinct feeling of *déjà vu*. While the OGS has not previously performed this John Chapman and Dave Freeman play, *Key For Two* resembled last year's production of *The Amorous Ambassador* a little too much. For that matter, the play was typical OGS fare and in many ways was a reincarnation of the two-act British comedies that the society has been staging for the past decade or so. It offered up the standard mix of slapstick comedy, sexual innuendo, mistaken identities, mistimed exits, slamming doors, *double entendre* and inebriated characters.

Veterans of the OGS stage, including Mervyn Hosein, Maya Ismail, Raahen Mani, Umbereen Beg-Mirza and Saman Shamsie, were back in form, faking British accents, spilling things all over themselves and repeatedly falling on-stage. Indeed, Niran Rehman and Tahir Munir did wonders by giving the production a bit of a face-lift simply by being newcomers. But with Marrisona Karim directing as per tradition, they too blended within the production, keeping it formulaic.

Of course, for those who have never seen an OGS production, *Key For Two* was a racy, raucous, romping treat thanks to Karim's slick directing, a classy set and well-timed one-liners. In fact, many members of the audience found themselves in rib-aching hysterics on April 29, the opening night of the play. It helped that the storyline revolves around Harriet, the mistress of not one but two married men Gordon and Alec. But when Harriet's friend Anne returns from New Zealand after leaving her husband, Harriet's doubly kept woman is jeopardised. While Gordon is confined to Harriet's bed after spraining his ankle, Alec unexpectedly arrives, hoping for a weekend of debauchery. Anne, who is envious of Harriet's arrangement, tries to seduce Gordon but things get truly hectic when Magda and Mildred, the wives of Gordon and Alec respectively, turn up in search of their husbands. During the course of events, vodka is swigged, hearts are broken and vets confused with physicians.

Ismail delivered a winning performance as Harriet. Her perfectly smug, cat-who-ate-the-canary expression and brazen barrage of scandalous dialogue proved to be the backbone of many comic scenes. The audience was particularly floored during a scene when Ismail mimics a Japanese geisha administering acupuncture and instead stabs Alec in the backside with a darning needle. Similarly, Mani in the role of Anne was alternately



Farhan Boshary



slapstick and sultry. While Hosein's deadpan delivery and incongruous dignity conjured Alec as a stereotypical British businessman going through a mid-life crisis, Rehman did not fare equally well as Gordon. Unfortunately, his tendency to shout rather than speak made Rehman anything but comic.

For his part, Munir played Richard, Anne's alcoholic husband, rather well. Although he took a while to warm up, initially appearing epileptic rather than inebriated, Munir actually caused a buzz among audience members who eventually found themselves wondering what he may have knocked back before hitting the stage.

Ultimately, *Key For Two* made for a pleasant evening. But it is high time that the OGS staged something a tad different. No doubt, Karim's team finds the madcap antics of a British comedy to be a winning formula. But unfortunately, the key word here is formula. Sex sells and laughter may be the best medicine but the acting prowess and professionalism of the familiar OGS troupe could probably ensure the success of something a little less mainstream as well. ■ — Huma Yusuf