

## REVIEW

# Deft delivery of Stoppard classic

**WHAT:** *Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard directed by Mark Harris

**WHERE:** Stagecraft Theatre, Gryphon Theatre, 22 Ghuznee St, till Sept 18.

**REVIEWED BY:** Ewen Coleman

THE CLEVER wordplay and intricate plotting that British playwright Tom Stoppard has become famous for is never more evident than in *Arcadia*, probably his most accomplished play to date.

This extremely complex play draws its themes from a whole host of widely disparate areas such as Fermat's Theorem, algebra, algorithms, chaos theory, landscape gardening and Lord Byron and intertwines them with the social and sexual mores of 1809 and today. It shows that while scientific discoveries can be determined and explained personalities can't nor can the unpredictability of sexual attraction be explained or understood through logic.

In a way that only someone like Stoppard can achieve, the events and actions of the past and their by-products such as letters and drawings become the basis of speculation and interpretation by those in the present.

Central to the past scenes is Thomasina, a young girl of 13, whose intellectual awakening and burgeoning sexuality has a profound effect on her tutor Septimus, while in the present scenes the central character is Hannah, a re-

searcher, trying to suppress her sexuality and use her intellectual wit to counter the argument that Lord Byron was a murderer, put forward by another academic, Bernard.

As the scenes alternate between the past and present, the set — a room in a stately manor house — and its sparse furnishings and props cleverly remain the same throughout for both eras. And in this production director Mark House has successfully accomplished this fusion of the two periods with his functional set that serves the actors well, all of whom move and perform with confidence and assurance, if not totally getting to grips with the play's many layers.

The first half, especially, became laboured and static with much of the sexual tension and humour missing. The second half, however, developed the lightness of touch and quickness of delivery Stoppard demands.

Outstanding amongst the large and competent cast is Catherine McMechan's Lady Croom, capturing beautifully the style and manner of the period, her sexual allure enticingly delicious. Ben Cain also gives a great performance as the haughtily arrogant Bernard, and although the chemistry between Amy Brown's Thomasina and Darren Clark's Septimus has yet to develop they nevertheless give convincing performances.