

From Russia with 42 "what ifs"

vtp starts with Nina Variations

I had not read Chekhov's "The Seagull" before, but I had to afterwards. So "The Nina Variations" by Stephen Dietz - currently presented by the vienna theatre project (vtp) - could be seen as a Chekhov promotion play.

Dietz locks up Nina and Treplev in a room and lets them run through 42 alternative endings of their famous last scene in "The Seagull". Things they should better have said and rather not have done, or the other way round, are presented in the 90-minute play. The various ideas never converge though - and it seems they were never supposed to.

In a way the same criticism applies which Nina gives Treplev's play: "There are no people in it and nothing is happening." Dietz reduces Chekhov's two main characters to guinea pigs and the audience can judge for themselves for which scene they might be rewarded. And they should, because Jennifer Lee Mitchell (Nina) and Greg Nelsen (Treplev) convincingly change feelings, attitudes and moods from scene to scene and some of them offer a completely new picture of the play and its characters. It also has to be said that most of them are much more concise and to the point than Chekhov's ending. The setting and the change-over between the scenes was also realised very well, thanks to director Agnes Kitzler.

"The Nina Variations" will be on until Sept 25, daily at 8 p.m. in the Theater Drachengasse.