

Reading into a relationship

A play explores what's between the lines. By Reetika Mohindra

Playwright Pasquale Palmieri is obsessed with finding the “perfect couple”.

“It is my fixation,” he confesses. “I’ve been through two divorces, and between the first and the second I decided I wanted to find them.”

The latest manifestation of his fixation is *Benjamin Mary*, a three-act play that will premiere this week at Gasworks Art Park as part of the annual Melbourne Italian Festival.

Set in contemporary Melbourne and directed by Izeqiel McCoy, *Benjamin Mary* is an intimate look at one couple’s relationship and how it evolves throughout their lives. The piece is primarily a drama, but elements of comedy are incorporated using the traditional Italian masked theatre form *commedia dell’arte*.

Although the Italian-born playwright admits it will be a challenge adapting this style of theatre for a modern Australian audience, he contends: “What I am trying to do is extrapolate the concept of creating a caricature without going to the extreme.”

The playwright believes this style allows comedy to be injected into drama to more accurately reflect life.

“You can laugh and you can cry at the same time.”

Another unique feature of *Benjamin Mary* is that it will be presented as a “read” performance, where the actors read from the scripts on stage.

Palmieri believes there are many benefits in presenting a play as a read performance.

“The actors are more relaxed because they have the script, and this allows them to give 100 per cent without any fear.”

Lower production costs also means tickets are cheaper, making the experience more accessible.

“It is still a theatrical performance with visual interest, the difference is the actors have their scripts,” Palmieri says.

He believes the audience benefits because “it is a more intimate experience”. This intimacy is perhaps ideal when dealing with the subject matter of the play because, as Palmieri says: “At some point, relationships will touch everybody’s soul.”

Benjamin Mary will show at Gasworks Arts Park Theatre, 21 Graham Street, Albert Park on May 28 at 8pm. Details: gasworks.org.au or 9699 3253.

