

Repertory Philippines' "Betrayal" is a no-drama drama - PeopleAsia

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4-5 minutes

You may not see waterworks and fireworks when you watch Repertory Philippines' staging of Harold Pinter's "Betrayal," but you will most certainly see infidelity in a different, more subtle light.

Just to be clear, cheating is still a big no-no, even in 2024. But much like a trainwreck or some embarrassing viral video, it's something we simply can't take our eyes off.



Betrayal leads, London-based Filipino actors James Bradwell, Vanessa White and James Cooney

Harold Pinter's Olivier Award-winning play, which raises its curtains for Repertory Philippines' 87th season, is one such thing.

Presented in reverse-chronological order, “Betrayal” follows its protagonists — art gallerist Emma, her publisher husband Robert, and his best friend, a literary agent named Jerry — as it reveals the hows and whys of how their personal relationships broke apart over the course of nine acts. The play itself is inspired by Pinter’s own seven-year affair, which takes place in London and Venice over a nine-year period.

Clocking in at a little over an hour, the show stays as close as it can to its cleverly written source material — steering clear of the melodramatics that most extra-marital stories are known for. Instead of portraying the trio’s relationship like the trainwreck that it was, the play takes its time to unravel the situation, plucking each layer off like petals from a rose. Calmly. Patiently. Decisively. Until it shows you what nipped this marriage in the bud.



James Bradwell delivers an exceptional performance

While the show is entertaining and undoubtedly well-acted — especially the very nuanced and layered performance of London-based Filipino actor **James Bradwell** (the husband) — *Betrayal*, is no longer, dare we say it, shocking.

Having debuted in 1978, the source material is now almost 46 years old. Extra-marital stories involving best friends, siblings and everything in between are now a dime a dozen. Even the reverse-chronological order, which was, perhaps, quite a novelty in 1978,

has been done by many others.

With these said, Rep's *Betrayal* tries to keep things fresh by adding new elements to the play. And while they are not exactly shocking, they do add new layers.



Director Victor Lirio (second from left) with White, Bradwell and Cooney

For one, the show opens with the works of Filipino visual artist **Pacita Abad**, which, according to director **Victor Lirio**, pays homage to Emma's Filipino roots. "We will be exploring *Betrayal* from the second-generation Filipino immigrant experience in London and set it in the contemporary time. Though born in England, actors **James Cooney**'s and **Vanessa White**'s families are from Davao and James Bradwell's from Naga City. My family is from Batangas. And we will mine our Filipino roots to re-tell this beautiful and complicated story." It's a beautiful thought that was, however, much clearer in the talkback session, rather than in the show itself.

The stage itself is well thought of and effective, thanks to the deft hand of set designer **Miguel Urbino**, who intelligently establishes each scene by just simply moving around a few boxes, and adding a few flourishes here and there. Incorporating authorized reproductions of Pacita's artworks to the set design also add to the production value.

John Batalla, also delivers with his lighting design, amplifying emotions that are deliberately set to a minimum, perhaps due to the very British humor and distinct sarcasm of the script itself.

While Pinter's story may no longer be shocking in this day and age — where wives beat their husband's lovers and vice-versa on viral Facebook videos — it still manages to stay true to portray the kind of betrayal that it was written for. There's little-to-no waterworks, no shouting, no screaming, no, egad, slapping! Clearly, this is not *No Other Woman*, and as one of the viewers said on opening night, "Thank God for that!" — **By Jose Paolo S. dela Cruz**

Repertory Philippines' (REP) Betrayal runs at the Carlos P. Romulo Theater in RCBC Plaza until March 17. Manila-based actors and Philstage Gawad Buhay awardees Regina De Vera and Jef Flores, will also take on the lead roles. Visit www.repertoryphilippines.ph for more details.