

## Full marks for lively farce

*Dormez, Je Le Veux* by Georges Feydeau. Melbourne French Theatre directed by Michael Bula at Belconnen Community Centre. March 19-20. Canberra National Multicultural Festival.

**L**A FRANCOPHONIE is an association of 48 French-speaking countries from five continents — from Belgium to Vietnam, Nigeria to Canada, Egypt to France itself. For World Francophonie Day, as part of Canberra National Multicultural Festival, Feydeau's Belle-Epoque farce was an interesting choice.

Michael Bula's direction, and performance of man-about-town Boriquet, showed class befitting the French mime tradition and its historical links to *commedia dell'arte*. Clearly everyone in the cast — with special mention of the two valets, Justin (Eddy Fatha) and the Belgian accented Elol (Dominique Gibert) — understood the style and played it for all their worth.

It's a pity there could be only two performances in Canberra. I'd go again to see Frederique Fouche, as Boriquet's sister Francine, playing Carmen under hypnosis, with her brother, also hypnotised, acting as a monkey.

No wonder Dr Valencourt (Nicholas Panayotis) and his daughter, Emilienne (Catherine Pierce), thought them mad, until the Doctor realised that Justin was the hypnotist — and so it was safe for Emilienne to marry Boriquet after all.

It was also appropriate to humiliate Justin by making him say, under hypnosis, "*Je suis miserable*". In a final twist of farce, Justin was only pretending to be hypnotised: after the upper-class people exit, he raises his fists to declare with great pride, "*Je suis miserable*".

From Hula's notes about giving the play "bite" and emphasising the socio-political context, I guess this is a reference to Hugo and *Les Miserables*. The problem is that this servant is actually celebrating his continued employment as a servant: Feydeau confirmed the upper classes in their rightful place — no emancipation here.

Feydeau's essential conservatism, clothed in such good humour, makes an interesting comment not just on French society of the *fin de (last) siècle* but on La Francophonie at the end of this century: not all the old colonies have quite risen to full independence, and it was a bitter struggle for many who have.

— FRANK MCKONE