

Arts & Culture

Fine French farce with a soupçon of Benny Hill

THEATRE **RUN FOR YOUR WIFE** **(STATIONNEMENT ALTERNE)**

Melbourne French Theatre. By Ray Cooney, adapted by Stewart Vaughan and Jean-Christophe Barc. Collingwood College Theatre, May 6. Until tonight. Running time: 120 minutes.
Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

THIS French-language adaptation of Ray Cooney's popular farce is a cocktail of big lies and bigamy. Taxi driver Jean (Richard Stracchi) has two wives — Mathilde (Frederique Fouche) and

Charlotte (Brunehilde Munier) — in different arrondissements of Paris. His irregular hours provide the perfect cover, but an act of heroism sees his web of deceit begin to unravel.

After receiving a head injury while trying to save a vagrant, Jean ends up with the wrong wife at the wrong time. And two nosy gendarmes — the punctilious Inspecteur Treguier (Michael Bula) and the soft-hearted Inspecteur Pontarlier (Eddy K. Fatha) — smell a rat.

To deflect the suspicion of his wives and the police, Jean teams

up with Gilbert (Erwann de Carheil), a layabout neighbour, to tell a string of absolute whoppers. No fib is too improbable, with grandparents eaten by sharks, invented children and gay orgies coming into play. Each lie lands them in deeper merde. As different dupes collide, the double, triple, even quadruple entendres fly.

Melbourne French Theatre brings us a swift and funny production that embraces inanity and prurient physical antics (there's more than a dash of Benny Hill involved). Some of

the timing could be better, and the caricature more outrageous. But the comic talents of Fouche, Fatha and de Carheil, in particular, carry the show. Stig Wemyss, himself a comedian, excels at directing the non-verbal humour, but he needs to tighten the group scenes.

A word of warning: the rapid-fire dialogue leads to a constant barrage of surtitles. You'll want at least a passing familiarity with the language to maximise your enjoyment, but high school French is enough to save you from reading every word.