

# 'Private Lives' makes a hilarious smash

The Hebrew version of the 1930 play by Noël Coward, is very entertaining

## THEATER REVIEW

• By GADI ZAIG

Tel Aviv has always been a hub for great theater, and that continues to be demonstrated with *Private Lives*, a play being put on by the Yoram Loewenstein Performing Arts Studio, which started its performances in late December.

Written by English playwright Noël Coward in 1930, this modernized production is directed by Matan Shavit, a professional actor at the Habima Theatre.

The comedic play "deals with two couples on a dreamy honeymoon while at the height of the most romantic moment of their lives... until they run into their exes who just happen to be staying at the same hotel," the Tel Aviv production's synopsis says. "What happens next is passions reigniting, characters burning of jealousy, and what was supposed to be the ideal vacation now turning into a battleground of love and hate."

"Directing is very challenging because you're essentially in charge of a lot of different elements," Shavit told *The Jerusalem Post*. "You have to manage dialogue with the lighting, the costume departments, the makeup, the actors, the music, etc. But when it works, it's an amazing feeling."

The director always makes new discoveries through the talent of the actors in his process of directing the show. "In the rehearsal room, I always discover new things about the play that I wasn't aware of. It doesn't matter how much preparation you do prior; many ideas can only be discovered through actually meeting and rehearsing with the actors."

When asked about his favorite part of being a director, Shavit said it's when



PRIVATE LIVES actors (from L): Itai Tarnaruder as Victor, Naya Bienstock as Amanda, Niv Shitrit as Sibyl, and Dali Shachnaey as Elyot. (Redi Rubenstein)

audiences finally come to see something he's invested a lot of time and effort into.

"I imagine this whole experience is a lot like making a new life. It's like my 'baby,'" he said. "'Cause for the past three months, maybe not nine like a pregnancy, I nurtured and crafted this whole thing, and now suddenly it's now out to the world."

DIRECTING COMEDY is very challenging, Shavit said, because it's "a genre that works a lot with timing. The punchline has to be timed perfectly, and the actors need to have great comedic sense to pull it off."

And the actors certainly don't disappoint in that area, because all five of them had us laughing hysterically. Dali Shachnaey (Elyot), Naya Bienstock (Amanda), Itai Tarnaruder (Victor), Niv Shitrit (Sibyl), and Inbal Bar-Lev (Louise) all made the performance as funny as it was (Shitrit and Bar-Lev alternate the roles of Sibyl and Louise depending on the show).

Shachnaey was powerfully energetic and devious in his role, and Bienstock's physicality and star power got the whole crowd's attention. Tarnaruder had the audience laughing with his cleverly



DIRECTOR Matan Shavit (Noa Nir)

timed line deliveries, and Shitrit also drew immense laughter with her comedic timing and performance. And Bar-Lev, who played French hotel maid Louise that night, had the audience cracking up without speak-ing a word of Hebrew.

When he discovered that he was going to direct the play, Shavit traveled to London to see a version of Coward's comedy.

"The play is British, which

when I saw it in London, I noticed a specific kind of direction that I would also say is a bit outdated. When I left the theater, I thought maybe I made a mistake in choosing to direct this. It was too outdated, in my opinion."

However, Shavit saw this as an opportunity to challenge himself as a director, to give his take on the play and to do something new and different in a British work that wasn't his cup of tea.

"I brought the entire play that was written in 1930 to today's standards – in character design, type of music, etc. It all takes place in the present. There's even [spoiler alert!] a rap battle between two characters who are fighting, [which I arranged] by adjusting a bit of the dialogue; and they're even holding microphones – like what happens in *Hamilton*. We decided to use elements such as electronic music, dubstep, and spoken word – areas that are more 'street' in today's world."

Shavit said that people "have to come see this show, because this play is like a mirror to the relationships we have in real life. It particularly gives a really good representation of complex relationships between men and women, but it can also be about a relationship between two men, or two women: The dynamics shown here are universal. Anyone, to a certain extent, can find themselves in one of the characters."

If you want to take your mind off the current war in the Middle East, this new Tel Aviv production of *Private Lives* will have you laughing for much of its 1 hour and 40 minute runtime.

Performances, which are in Hebrew, run until January 26. Tickets can be bought at <https://www.studioact.co.il/>. Follow the production on their Instagram @private\_lives\_studioact.