

## ArtsHub review by Charlene Li

Science, art, and humanity intersect in **The Mathematics of Longing**.



*Photo credit: Art-Work Agency*

*The Mathematics of Longing* presented by La Boite in collaboration with dance-theatre company The Farm and playwright Suzie Miller's production company The Uncertainty Principle is the world premiere of Miller's wildly ambitious play that examines science, art, and human nature through the prism of theatre.

The loose premise of *The Mathematics of Longing* is an exploration of theories in mathematics and physics through the relationships of two differing couples: a physicist, and a science-minded playwright along with their daughter Lily (played by La Boite's Todd McDonald, Ngoc Pham and Merlynn Tong respectively), and rockstar Adam and his girlfriend Ines (performed by The Farm's Gavin Webber and Kate Harman).

The structure is non-linear, comprising of a series of scenes called 'events' that begin with an actor describing a theory, which is then mirrored in the human interactions that ensue. Although grand in scope and vision, it appears there was a conscious creative choice for the final result of this production to be one that's accessible and down-to-earth. For a show titled 'The Mathematics of Longing' there's a surprising amount of slapstick humor throughout the play.

Opening the work is an introductory segment with the performers on stage, out-of-character (or rather, not as characters written in the play) talking to the audience about physics in a tone that's enthusiastic but almost incongruously casual, before transitioning to the main play in a flurry of physical comedy. The main play unfolds in a manner reminiscent of arthouse comedy films – a whimsical examination of human relationships with philosophical and in this case theoretical overtones.

The various techniques used across the respective 'events' (that communicate the respective theories) seems like a series of experiments in itself, with varying degrees of success. The performances from each of the cast members was committed and emotionally convincing, although the characterisation of the roles of the playwright and the physicist at times seemed two-dimensional. Ross Manning's set design is sparse and modest, but effectively compliments each of the 'events' and the vividly intimates theories they're meant to depict. He ingeniously transforms seemingly mundane objects such as books and light bulbs into structures such as helixes and spirals.

This premiere production of *The Mathematics of Longing* is overall an enjoyable and stimulating theatre experience, but it feels like a first draft of a grand and difficult-to-execute idea. Having read through Suzie Miller's poetic script of this play it seems there's potential there that is yet to be realised.

**4 ½ stars: ★★★★★☆**