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## Once Upon A Time In Trieste

Anna Girolami

Silver Pine Productions

Hope Aria House, Manchester

10 to 12 July 2019

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Once Upon A Time In Trieste



It is unlikely Mancunians will have much knowledge of the background to events in *Once Upon A Time In Trieste* which concerns developments in Italy and Mexico in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Silver Pine Productions thoughtfully provide a summary which is amusing, informative and to the point. The play, whilst informative is, however, verbose and meandering.

In 1938, after his effort to assassinate Benito Mussolini fails, Pinko (Carl Bownas) takes refuge in what he knows to be an abandoned building. Instead, he finds it is occupied by Charlotte of Belgium (Sarah Gordon) who died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is waiting for the return of her husband who Pinko knows was executed. As the couple squabble, they eventually find the courage to take the action each realises is required.

The main objective of author Anna Girolami is to ensure the historical detail in the play is

credible. Hence, there are scenes of card games with the careful use of phrases appropriate to the place and time. It is a valid approach but self-indulgent when it comes at the expense of the under-developed plot. The revelation that Pinko's freedom fighter rhetoric was bluster lacks impact as it comes so late in the play the initial outburst has been forgotten amid all the lengthy speeches.

The possibility that the characters have travelled in time brings a fantasy element to the play which is appropriate as both of them have to find ways of moving away from the comforting illusions that have sustained them. However, director Simon Corble takes a pedestrian approach to the material and ignores this angle. Similarly, the possibility of a flirtation between the characters, or a lighter touch to some of the material, is ignored. No efforts are made to draw out aspects of the play that might be of interest to a contemporary audience—the possibility of conflict as Catherine, part of the ruling elite, could regard Pinko as a terrorist rather than a rebel.

Sarah Gordon and Carl Bownas give fully-committed performances but the emotionally sterile atmosphere makes it hard to relate to the characters or share their concerns.

Immense care has been taken over the factual aspects of *Once Upon A Time In Trieste* but the plot and level of emotional involvement have been neglected. Despite the best efforts of all involved, therefore, the audience remains detached from the events in the play struggling to see their relevance to the present day.

**Reviewer:** [David Cunningham](#)