

Costanzo nimble and agile

MUSICAL THEATRE LIFE'S A CIRCUS

Music/Lyrics Anthony Costanzo
Magnormos, Theatreworks, 14 Acland
Street, St Kilda
Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

CIRCUS and musical theatre are two performing arts where we punch above our weight. Anthony Costanzo's *Life's A Circus* is a new Australian musical that combines them, and director Kris Stewart uses the opportunity to throw bags of talent at it in this dynamic and expertly realised production.

David (Glen Hogstrom) and Vivien (Chelsea Plumley) are trapeze artists and old pals. For them, the travelling life has lost its lustre. Its lust remains intact, and their cold hotel rooms heat up when they fall for the same boy, Alex (Cameron Macdonald) – a dishy, starry-eyed young clown. Romantic rivalry looms, and the emotional fall-out threatens David and Vivien's friendship and livelihood.

It's a stellar cast. The three leads have commercial stage



Chelsea Plumley's Vivien.

experience and the presence, powerful voices and acting ability that goes with the territory. Musically, Costanzo puts them through their paces. The score has a demanding vocal and tonal range, with soaring big notes, effortless harmonies and comic speech-song, all performed with boundless energy.

Circus acts are woven seamlessly through the show, the

troupe – Annabel Carberry, Vaughan Curtis, Stephen Williams, Shannon McGurgan – demonstrating acrobatic prowess and comedic flair. The use of circus is most spectacular and effective in conjunction with song and dance, as in the showstopper *Walking The Tightrope*.

The musical itself has shortcomings. Costanzo has a huge gift as a composer, but his lyrical and dramatic acumen don't yet match it. He is brilliant at setting a scene, writing comic duets and delivering striking melodies. He isn't as strong on emotional complexity and his male characters, in particular, remain curiously underdeveloped.

Where I expected the messy climax of *Life's A Circus* to leap Sondheim-like into post-modern doubt and emotive ambiguity, it reached instead for throwaway melodrama and vein-popping purity of emotion. It's a minor disappointment, though, in a show that remains imaginatively directed and skilfully performed.