

Love, tragedy, maths

 By [Patricia Pieterse](#)

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Complicite's *A Disappearing Number* introduces us to the art and beauty of mathematics. The second season of the National Theatre Live in the UK has started, which means some more interesting plays coming to cinemas in SA.



The first of this season is Simon McBurney's *A Disappearing Number*, from theatre company Complicite. From what I had read about the play beforehand, I thought it is about the relationship and collaboration between mathematicians Srinivasa Ramanujan and GH Hardy.

While the play does include these, it is essentially a tragic love story about a businessman and his mathematician wife.

The play is sometimes confusing, not because of the mathematics, but because of the non-linearity of time.

However, it is still beautifully and creatively produced and directed. The play begins by breaking the fourth wall - an actor explains how the actors are all playing parts, and all the set pieces are fake, but the mathematics is real.

Set in England and India, the play deals with difficult themes like exile and mortality. The play introduces mortality early on, adding to its feeling of inevitability.

But the real star is maths. Many of the characters explain the beauty of mathematics, how a mathematician, like an artist, creates patterns.

This is a comparatively short play, at 110 minutes, and has no intermission. It is also thoroughly enjoyable and emotional.

ABOUT PATRICIA PIETERSE

Patricia Pieterse works as a technology journalist, and holds a BA Journalism degree from UJ. Contact her at patti.lain@gmail.com

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