



Comfort Zone – 2005

Theatre Review Written By: Darren Pope
Position: Arts Journalist
Publication: BNews
Dated: 6th October 2005

It's Just Wicked

THEY don't call this the city of festivals for nothing. The Melbourne International Arts Festival launches this week but there are still a couple of days to catch a few pearls from Fringe Festival. *Comfort Zone* by Cosmic Players is one such work. Produced by playwrights Darren Brealey and Stuart Pursell this fringe piece has the local theatre scene firmly in its sights and it pulls no punches. Funding bodies, egomaniacally artistic directors, green playwrights all get a good ribbing.

The play itself was born out of frustration of Brealey and Pursell in gaining support from the theatre industry. One slap in the face too many and they've put it all in a play. The end result is a thespian take in the manner of Mark Latham diaries.

The farce unfolds in the admin office of a local theatre company on the eve of news of the latest funding round. Artistic director Deirdre James is ropable to learn her sexual favours for arts funding have backfired. Not only is the Arts Minister not coming to the swish preseason launch, but also there will be no money.

The great strength of the Melbourne Fringe Festival is in giving performance space to new untried works. Don't expect gay soapbox theatre from these playwrights. *Comfort Zone* is rampantly heterosexual and that's one of its strengths. It comes across as a bitter drag queen take on the whole incestuous theatre world. Double-ended dildos in the filing cabinet, ejaculate dressing on hot dogs, weak bladders, post coital cigarettes every 5 minutes.

The humour is pitch black and if you needed an argument for 'gay sensitivity' in the arts, here it is.

All the performers have a ball, hamming up their respective roles. Alexis Beebe as Deirdre James is a stand out, playing the over sexed artistic director like a frisky she goat in pursuit of a horny mate. In *Comfort Zone*, the Cosmic Players have delivered a rare gem in the hit and miss festival game – a piece of new theatre that is hilariously self referential and thematically bold.

Comfort Zone

Production Information

Playwrights: Darren Brealey & Stuart Pursell

Producer: Darren Brealey

Director: Elizabeth Penny

Performed during the 2005 Melbourne Fringe Festival, at the Bedford Hotel, 1 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne.

Comfort Zone is a ninety minute full length comedy.

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Performing The Goat – 1999

Theatre Review Written By: Dinah Arndt
Position: Arts Journalist
Publication: Buzz Cuts
Dated: September 1999

In *Performing the Goat* Producer/Playwright Darren Brealey delivers humorous and often terrifyingly accurate portrayals of stereotypical Australian characters in their ‘natural’ environments.

...Now step into the world of ‘The Mechanics’ and meet old school, ‘all knowing’ tradesman Norbert. He generously takes new kid Colin under his wing, tutoring him in the sacred arts of mechanic ethics and relationships. Too much amusement, great Australian grunter Colin proves he isn’t as stupid as appearances initially indicate...

The only real disappointment? Not a goat in sight.

Performing The Goat

Production Information

Playwright: Darren Brealey

Producer: Darren Brealey

Director: Elizabeth Penny

Performed during the 1999 Melbourne Fringe Festival, at Trades Hall, Victoria Parade, Carlton South.

A Couple of S.N.A.G.S., The Mechanics and The Chicks were first performed in the Annexe Room, Melbourne, in October 1999.

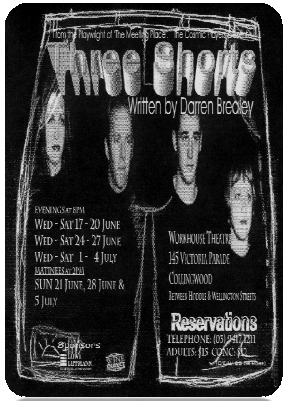
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Theatre Review Written By: Adam Pont
Position: Arts Journalist
Publication: Buzz cuts
Dated: September 1999

Social observations are a frequent resource for many Australian play writes, and justifiably so due to the large number of eccentric characters that exist everywhere in our country. *PERFORMING THE GOAT* plucks several of these enigmas from obscurity to show just how bizarre and intriguing the person next door actually is. Darren Brealey presents four short plays that capture colloquial Aussie stereotypes and portray them with hilarious accuracy.

... ‘The Mechanics’ is an amusing insight into the games men and women play (or at least the games men think women want them to play). Russell Healy is outstanding as Colin, the slow and simple Mechanic who at the end of the day shows he knows much more about the female mind than his intellectually superior workmate Norbert...

The most disturbing thing about these plays is that there are characters like this in life that actually exist.



Three Shorts – 1998

Theatre Review Written By: Bernadette Kelly
Position: Arts Journalist
Publication: Stage Whispers
Dated: August 1998

With *Three Shorts*, Darren Brealey has written an eclectic mixture of observations that manage, somehow, to connect.

Disturbing Mavis

Disturbing Mavis is a look at the practical side of growing old, and the not-so-attractive consequences. Elizabeth Penny is convincing as the bored and slightly confused elderly woman, living in a nursing home with her husband, Alfred. Mavis fills the boredom of her days by reading and engaging in one-sided arguments with an inert Alfred. When ambulance officers and nurse arrive to take Alfred away, we discover the reason for Alfred's inertia and witness Mavis's frustration and helplessness. Overall, *Disturbing Mavis* was a sad but all too often accurate portrayal of the treatment of aged citizens

The Stair

The Stair is a far less sombre but equally truthful observation. Mr Green (Jamie Wilson) is the company boss. He meets Carson (Tim Constantine) in the stairwell. It's lunchtime, Mr Green is incredibly busy and the lift is broken. Through the two protagonist's conversation, we learn that the task of getting the lift repaired is anything but a simple one. Meetings, faxes, memos, signatures, and all the trappings of bureaucracy at its most ridiculous are a part of this farcical exchange. Tim Constantine comes across well as Carson, the ever efficient but overworked clerk and Jamie Wilson does justice to the absent-minded boss who falls foul of his own time and money-saving strategies.

Champagne Ladies

The satirical *Champagne Ladies* was definitely my favourite. Miranda King and Elizabeth Penny are Narelle and Darlene. These two darlings are the epitome of all that is offensive with the society set. Preened, primed, cut and set, the pair meet at one of the in places to see and be seen. Keeping a sharp eye out for their well-heeled colleagues and guzzling down champagne, the audience is witness to a prattling stream of inane gossip that has its origins at every gala ball and celebrity luncheon on the social calendar. With the children packed away at boarding schools and husbands off doing deals, the lives of these women are an endless round of charity functions, where one must definitely be seen but never twice in the same outfit. Miranda King has a repertoire of fabulous faces for this role while Elizabeth Penny has perfected the art of tipsiness. Tim Constantine is the dishevelled waiter who can barely suppress his contempt, a view that I couldn't help but share. This was a very funny play. My only concern is that the substance-lacking personalities that are portrayed might actually exist - what a tragedy that would be.

Three Shorts

Production Information

Playwright: Darren Brealey

Producer: Darren Brealey

Directors: Shaun Oxley & Darren Brealey

Performed as a standalone event at The Workhouse Theatre, Victoria Pde, Collingwood.

Disturbing Mavis, *The Stair* and *Champagne Ladies* were first performed at the Workhouse Theatre, Melbourne, in June 1998.

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The Meeting Place – 1996

Theatre Review Written By: Ralph Mclean
Position: Arts Journalist
Program: 3RRR Radio
Dated: 16th October 1996

Darren Brealey's first time writing/directing piece in a makeshift bar theatre. His *The Meeting Place* was a simple even old fashioned story of family and loss. I rarely cry in the theatre - at least for emotional reasons - but there I was enjoying some new talent. And I was bawling, with the joy of it and of the magic of a good yarn well put, the tears running down my cheeks like a bloody baby.

The Meeting Place

Production Information

Playwright: Darren Brealey

Producer: Darren Brealey

Director: Justin Conkey

Performed during the 1996 Melbourne Fringe Festival, at the East Melbourne Hotel (E.M.H.), Hoddle Street, East Melbourne.

The Meeting Place is a two act, ninety-minute full length dramatic play.

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Award

The Meeting Place was selected by the Board and Staff of the 1996 Melbourne Fringe and Awards Judges for a special recommendation award in the category of the Melbourne Fringe Performance Arts Awards.

Theatre Review Written By: John Aston
Position: Arts Journalist
Publication: The Melbourne Times
Dated: 16th October 1996

This drama places gay guy David (Adam Turnbull) fair and square in the middle of suburbia; in Neighbours land. In denial of the fact are David's mum and dad (Elizabeth Penny and Simon Laidler). In disgust at the fact are his sister and brother (Clare O'Sullivan and Raphael Summut). Accepting of the fact is potential brother-in-law (Paul Henderson). There's also the drinkin' lover (Tim Constantine), the night-clubbin' girlfriend (Irene Guzowski) and the homophobic (Luke Jelleff). This could've been a safe family drama but Act Two tears us out of the bitchin' kitchen into the night streets and jungle parkland. At times the dialogue in *The Meeting Place* is more discursive than dramatic. However, the script never shies away from the fundamental issues confronting the homosexual in family and society. Overall, it's a fine result for first timers, writer Darren Brealey and director Justin Conkey. In expressing the wit and pain of the lead role, Adam Turnbull delivers an outstanding performance.