

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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Adelaide Fringe 2002

The Adelaide Fringe is a remarkable event, for its size, its energy and, especially for the opportunity it offers artists to reach their audiences. That has not been happening with much vigour in Adelaide of late. There has been less activity in the performing arts in the past two years and the link with audiences has often been a tenuous one. For any number of good and terrible reasons, people seem to have had their thoughts elsewhere. And, despite much vaunted prosperity in our community, for many young people, whether students or those just trying to get by, the cost of entertainment, and the sheer diversity of it, makes life particularly hard for emerging talents to get attention.

There is always, too, the problem of the famine or the feast. The contrast, between what we have been able to see in Adelaide in the two years since last Festival and what we have on offer in less than four weeks between this month and the first half of next, is almost laughable. So it is to be hoped, yet again, that the audience is not sliced so thin that artists, particularly those who have come from farther afield, will not get a chance to make a quid or two.

To some extent that is also the caffeine that drives the Fringe - that sense of urgency to identify what's the next new thing. Many, of course, prefer the Fringe to the Festival because it gives them precisely the opposite - the guaranteed experience of familiar acts, those no-risk shows supported by high profile regular names on radio and TV. It was good to hear at the launch, the Fringe's excellent AD, Katrina Sedgwick repeat the suggestion that many of us have made before about the program - to take some long shots, to go for old faves, by all means, but also to give the new piece a chance.

Looking through the Official Guide, which has been astutely distributed and niftily designed - from Luke Scholes' startled (or is it excited?) fawn logo to the ambitiousness of the FringeTX on-line booking office, the Fringe is looking well-managed, well-sponsored, youthful, sharp and consumer friendly. In a sense, the Bambi figure is ironic this year - rather than the uncertain little newcomer, the people over at the Adelaide Festival must surely be feeling that the Fringe looks more like Godzilla.

It is certainly gathering together a huge program. The press kit reminds us that there are 381 registered events, including 76 in comedy and 102 in theatre. There is also a huge visual arts and film and video program, the schools tour YEP event, regional programs, the ATSI indigenous arts project, special schedules for families and the Fresh Bait initiative for young artists.

So let's have a look at some of the theatre and comedy. The theatre has some popular headliners- Suzannah York's celebration of women in Shakespeare is likely to attract plenty, as is Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* - this time it features Amanda Blair, Zoe Carides and Libbi Gorr, the artist formerly known as Elle McFeast. New York performance artist Karen Finley returns for three nights, a must for those who already know her work. She's not exactly new on the block but she'll be a real discovery for many of the young and restless. Theatre O from the UK are presenting the highly rated 3 *Dark Tales* and fabrik Potsdam and DO-Theatre have the visually startling *Hopeless Games*.

Among the new and more local is ADT's *The Age of Unbeauty*, Sue Broadway's vaudeville memoir *Eccentric Acts*, *Filch* from Doubletap, physical theatre from Victoria, Lucy Dann's *The Heart of the Journey*, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts' *Yarnin' Up* and Junction Theatre's *Love Land and Money*, directed by Geoff Crowhurst. Vitalstatistix and Savage Wit present *Partly It's About Love, Partly It's About Massacre*, a return of the collaboration of writer Fiona Sprott and performer Jacqueline Linke who took out awards at Edinburgh with that other long title *Often I Find That I am Naked*.

Adelaide playwright Stephen House presents a new work *Walk in Dirt*, Peter Goers has a one man show because Somebody Has to Be, Tangent productions version of Marlowe's *Edward II* is sharing the Queens Theatre with Fresh Track's *The Return* written by Reg Cribb and directed by Geordie Brookman. Budgie Lung introduces the work of local writer Joshua Tyler with *Swallow Me*, a hermit in the 21st century. Theatre Guild's *Late Night Shopping*, monologues from new writers, is also well worth checking out.

Some successful and welcome returns include Brink Productions' *Killer Joe* which was one of the livelies of State Theatre's season last year and local professional group Bluetongue whose production of *Wit* at Theatre 62 gives us an excellent opportunity to see Margaret Edson's brilliant, literate work. Other theatre that looks enticing includes Seattle company, Theatre Simple's return with *52 Pick Up* and *Strindberg in Paris*, and in mid-March, two works at the Festival Centre - at the Playhouse, *Leitmotiv* from Canada's Les Deux Mondes Theatre Company and cult performer Bette Bourne as the almost-inimitable Quentin Crisp in *Resident Alien* at the Space.

The Comedy program is huge. Seventy six acts, including such usual suspects as Scared Little Weird Guys, Judith Lucy, Lano and Woodley, Rachel Berger, Merrick and Rosso and Wil Anderson. There is the Cream of the Irish and the Best of the Fest . I am always ready for more from Rich Hall - even as Otis Lee Crenshaw once again. Rod Quantock will deliver on *Scum Nation*, Ross Noble is returning as is the sparky Arj Barker. And, for those who really want to go all the way to Royston Vasey, there is one show only from Roy Chubby Brown.

There will be tents galore this Fringe. The Amazing Lunar Tent will be hosting a range of circus and cabaret shows including Acrobat, The Happy Sideshow, Taboo, Shenzo's Electric Stunt Orchestra, Aerialize and more big top acts. The sixty foot inflatable white dome at the Torrens Parade Ground will feature outstanding French aerialists Les Arts Sauts for a limited season. And the Famous Spiegeltent, (we saw it first folks and now Melbourne has finally discovered it) returns with performances from Paul Kelly, David Bridie, Joe Camilleri, Jimmy Little, Matt Walker, Vika and Linda, Andrea rienets, Dave Graney, John Butler, Augie March and the Proclaimers among several dozen notable others.

This Fringe, with its Hub at Adelaide Uni in the Union Building and its range of stuff across two hundred and eight venues is full of beans. Some of it will be brilliant, some of it amazing crap. Part of the buzz is to get in and sample. Go to see the things your friends are doing, and venture among strangers, these February and March days and nights in Adelaide-Festival, Fringe, whatever- should make the city buzz again.