

## Murray Bramwell's Reviews

*Appeared in - The Australian*

### **Horse Country**

by C.J. Hopkins

Clancy Productions

Eclipse, FringeHUB, Level 4 , Adelaide University

Until 6 March.

Sydney season Belvoir Street Downstairs

9 - 28 March.

### **Cincinnati**

by Don Nigro

Clancy Productions

Eclipse, FringeHUB, Level 4 , Adelaide University

Until 6 March.

Sydney season Belvoir Street Downstairs

9-28 March

### **Morph**

by Brendan Cowell

Fresh Track Productions

Little Theatre, FringeHUB, Adelaide University

until 14 March.

### **Notes From Underground**

adapted from Fyodor Dostoevsky

Theatre Simple

Cinema, FringeHUB, Adelaide University

until 2 March.

### **Songs for the Deaf**

by Caleb Lewis

Fresh Track Productions

North South Dining Room, FringeHUB, Adelaide University

until 14 March.

The first weekend of theatre in the Adelaide Fringe has opened strongly with a number of works interestingly clustered around the theme of imprisonment within the self. "Too much consciousness is a disease," remarks the Underground Man in Seattle based Theatre Simple's production of Notes From Underground, Dostoevsky's prophetic text from 1864. Andrew Litzky's versatile performance conjures both the desperation and ironic comedy of a man refusing to conform to the demands of his society. Part existential rebel, part George from Seinfeld, he runs like an open razor through St Petersburg causing us to laugh even as we cringe in recognition.

In the two works by New York's Clancy Productions such displacement is also apparent. In *Horse Country*, Sam and Bob (Ben Schneider and Kurt Rhoads) are two guys in a bar, downing Wild Turkey and talking the time away. They talk as if their lives depend on it, like the tramps in Beckett's *Godot*, except their cadences are in the hypermanic style of David Mamet. What we have here is a failure of communication, says Sam, quoting Cool Hand Luke, as the play zigzags from musings on American history and its frontier origins to the maze and the muddle of contemporary life. The actors give splendidly fluent performances, but author CJ Hopkins's text is sometimes even more elusive than the nine of diamonds that Sam and Bob keep looking for.

*Cincinnati* is the title of Don Nigro's play and it is also the site of pain. Susan teaches Philosophy and Literature and the subject of her lecture is death and suffering. Although it soon becomes clear that she is talking about herself. Nancy Walsh, directed by her husband John Clancy, brings poignant detail to a funny, bitter, sometimes terrifying portrait of a woman barely hanging on to her sanity after tragedy.

Brendan Cowell's *Morph* examines the ways in which the body becomes identity. Grace Black (Melanie Vallejo) is a dancer whose strict diet and physical regimen is an end in itself and Be, (Brendan Rock) is a man literally broken by attempts at suicide. When they meet in an improbable fairytale way they transform into each other - Grace gives up her dancing while Be becomes a fitness fanatic. The cyclic nature of these changes is sardonically explored in Cowell's imaginative but uneven text, directed by Geordie Brookman, with excellent music from Mark Harding and Liam Gerner.

Also from Fresh Track Productions is *Songs For the Deaf*, three short plays from talented newcomer Caleb Lewis. His writing captures the harshness and suspicion of social encounter - as in *Bunny*, where a young woman in a rabbit suit (Romy Loo) exits pursued by a bear. Or rather, a young man (Andrew Brackman) dressed as one. The monologue *Rocket Baby* features Becca, a primary school girl recalling how her dad tried to film the kids to send to Australia's Funniest Home Videos in the hope of enticing their mother to return. Directed by Iain Sinclair, Roberta Tyrell, as Becca, ably navigates the escalating horror of Lewis' macabre little satire.