

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

Appeared in - The Adelaide Review

Theatre

The official Fringe program is out and, once again, it is a humungous collection of human activity and human endeavour. Take the Theatre section, for instance. I counted ninety seven listings. That means at least ten times that many people have got themselves organised, forked out their own money and are putting on a show - for themselves, their friends, families, to impress their lovers and punish their ex-s, and to entertain the passing punters, like us, who might just step up on the night.

It is a marvellous leap of faith and deserves all the glory it can gather. The fact that inevitably some events will tumble for lack of support, and perhaps because they're not much chop, is, for the moment, beside the point. And that Adelaide has only a fraction of this activity at other times of the year is also another matter. The Fringe is that unique invitation to the whole city (and its visitors) to take a risk, see a show and try something new for once in our lives.

Of course, grappling with the choices and having any idea what we might expect is part of the fun - and the frustration - of the Fringe. Even those who follow the performing arts closely don't know where to look at Fringe time - and word of mouth is never more important than when someone comes across the Sleeper, the Surprise Hit, the Cinderella show that becomes the next Big Ticket.

Looking back over previous programs I am reminded of the past highlights. In 1998 There were the Tamarama Rock Surfers, the local new play *Catskin*, the talented Dawson Nichols' Edgar Allan Poe monologues, La Mama toured their *Survival of the Fittest Season*, and Back to Back and Handspan presented *Mind's Eye*. Last Fringe we saw Josh Tyler's *Swallow Me* from Budgie Lung, Fresh Track staged *The Return*, Bluetongue presented *Wit*, from Brink we saw *Killer Joe* and internationals included Karen Finley, Bette Bourne's *Resident Alien*, Theatre O's *Three Dark Tales* and Seattle's Theatre Simple presented *52 Pick Up*.

In 2004 the Fringe program is similarly beckoning. There are the classics - beginning with David Malikoff's performance of the Anglo-Saxon monster epic *Beowulf* and *Midsummer Night's Dream Reloaded* from Scrambled Prince

at the Mercury Cinema. Local company, Rough Magic is staging Ibsen's *Ghosts* at the Holden Street Theatres, directed by Alice Teasdale and featuring Michael Baldwin and Carl Nilsson-Polias.

Twentieth century Absurdist works are well represented - *Waiting for Godot* from Fourdoors theatre, *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter from Brink Productions - excellent contributors in past Fringe line-ups also - and Ionesco's *The Lesson* will be conducted on the Museum Lawns.

The international contingent again includes Seattle's Theatre Simple with *Notes From Underground* based on the text by Dostoevsky, other works from this company include *The Big Time* and *Parrot Fever*. *The Blue Orphan* from Canada's Catalyst Theatre looks intriguing, and for quality children's theatre, *Smashed Eggs* written by Phil Porter and presented by Sulis Productions is of interest.

Arts Projects Australia who presented *Three Dark Tales*, Les Arts Sauts's *Kayassine* and *Hopeless Games* in 2002 have a portfolio this time featuring *Horse Country* by C.J. Hopkins, a comic two-hander about the state of the 21st Century, *Cincinnati* a monologue from Nancy Walsh written by Don Nigro and *Pandora 88* from the German physical theatre company Fabrik who toured with *Hopeless Games* last time. All three have fared well in recent Edinburgh seasons as has *Mindbender* from the Peepolykus company comprising contortionists, psychics and general free spirits.

The Fringe theatre is also the place for new Australian works and experimental projects. Budgie Lung is restaging *Dark Paths* a trilogy by Stephen Sewell directed by Simone Avramidis and PA City Players are doing Daniel Keene's excellent one-acter, the greyhound saga, *Silent Partner* at the Prince Albert Hotel. A new work *X-Ray* by Chris Tugwell is especially timely - a well-researched account of David Hick's incarceration in Guantanamo Bay, it will play at the AIT Arts Acting Studio in Light Square and is directed by Geoff Crowhurst.

Fresh Track Productions return after a well-received season in Edinburgh with a new production of *Morph* by promising new writer Brendan Cowell and directed by Geordie Brookman. Fresh Track actor Caleb Lewis will also feature in his award winning trilogy *Songs for the Deaf* playing at the Fringe Hub. The Border Project's *Please Go Hop !* invites audiences to come

and go while they mix games with dance beats and other random manoeuvres- they can be found in the new Fringe venue Higher Ground on Wakefield Street. Alternative theatre stalwarts Bakehouse are staging a double bill under the title *Suburban Motel*. Also worth checking out is *In Winter's Discontent* - a solo piece featuring the excellent William Zappa, who we will see later in the year in State Theatre's *Death of a Salesman*.

And then there's the physical theatre - circuses at the garden of Earthly Delights include *Throw Down*, *The Happy Sideshow*, Vitastatistix and Frumpus joint venture *Crazed*, Circus Monoxide, Cirkus Inferno and even Spaghetti Circus. All these people busting to please us at the Fringe - get some friends and get along.