

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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Laughing Wild

by Christopher Durang

The Getaway Bus

by Ingle Knight

Festival of One

Bakehouse Theatre

After a late scratching from Series Three of Bakehouse Theatre's Festival of One, comes the welcome addition of *Laughing Wild*, a thirty minute monologue from American writer Christopher Durang. Taking its title from Samuel Beckett - "Laughing wild amidst severest woe" - it features an unnamed young woman who is repeatedly colliding with the world.

First, it is the person in the supermarket aisle, preventing her from reaching the shelf of tinned tuna. People are so insensitive, she comments, after reporting she had to hit him with a can. In need of something soothing she tries to hail a cab to take her to the art gallery. That, too, quickly turns into a confrontation and we soon realise that our unreliable narrator is not just agitated, she is very near the edge.

Emma Beech, directed by Anna Held, navigates this zig-zagging account with comic flair, keeping the paranoia and distress within the bounds of sympathy. But as she rails against buskers and Ricki Lake ("why does she think she is so interesting?") and sings the praises of Dr Harry Cooper (added, one guesses, for local topicality) it becomes all too apparent that while Beech's performance has conviction, Christopher Durang himself has not decided on his dramatic mix - how wild the laughter, how severe the woe?

The Getaway Bus, written and performed by Ingle Knight, is located in Perth - on the loop from Mirabooka to Mundaring Weir, to be precise. Thomas Carew is a gormless young Englishman fresh off the migrant boat and lost in Ockerland.

A chance meeting on the bus with Moffy, a Welsh refugee with vaulting ambitions as an actress has Thomas drawn into an amateur theatrical presided over by Frank, a tyrant for Thespis and, of course, conman to boot.

Ingle Knight, with a display of less-than-serious accents from Leeds, Cardiff, Johannesburg and the Barbican Centre, captures the desperate comedy of people isolated in an Australian city. Carew is so excruciatingly

shy - played almost to contortion by Knight - that he develops Tommy, a Mitty-like Walter ego with quite a bit more gumption than is helpful.

In his unfolding account of a theatre production going wrong, Knight adds a macabre twist when Moffy decides to subvert Chloe, the lead actress, and rise triumphantly as the understudy. The besotted Carew joins in the plan and the results take the play into black and ambiguous territory. In *The Getaway Bus*, Ingle Knight has created a clever vehicle for his considerable comic talents, but it does not bear too much close thematic inspection - otherwise we might find it is not just Thomas Carew who gets taken for a ride.