

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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Melbourne Festival Preview

Football is not the only reason for incursions over the Victorian border. The Melbourne International Arts Festival opens this month from 9th to the 25th. This is the second year for Robyn Archer as Artistic Director and, because she learnt a great deal from her time at the Adelaide Festival, Melbourne is definitely the city to watch - and watch out for. If we, in Adelaide, have a rival for pre-eminence in the festival business, it is certainly Melbourne.

Not only has Archer come up with three distinct themes for her programs, she is producing annually a program nearly as full as our biennial one. Last year her theme was Text, and she provided a canny and sometimes demanding range of offerings which had Melburnians wondering what had hit them. By all accounts this year's Body concept has them better prepared. Dance and physical theatre of course is the dominant form this time and Archer has chosen some excellent works including some which have premiered at previous Adelaide Festivals.

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, for instance, who featured here in 1998 and return in the first weekend with *Cursive II* incorporating calligraphy into their ravishing stage picture. Jan Fabre performed here nearly fifteen years ago but his work is still as controversial as ever. *I am Blood* is his sanguine investigation of all that bleeds. Other international acts include Dumb Type with *Memorandum*, Lepage collaborator Marie Brassard's *Jimmy*, Johan Pada from Dario Fo's Teatrale Fo-Rame and from Austrian-based Barry Kosky - *The Lost Breath*, a work blending the stories of Kafka with the music of Schumann.

Three Adelaide acts will feature - State Opera's version of Phillip Glass's *Akhmaten*, ADT with *The Age of Unbeauty* which has a short season here before transferring, and Cazerine Barry whose work *Sprung* played in the Space recently and is part of triple bill in Melbourne called *Inside 03*. Also appearing will be Chunky Move, The Franco-Australian Dance Exchange and grunge daredevils Acrobat. There is also a large free performance program in Federation Square and a strong visual arts selection.

Next month the wraps come off Stephen Page's program for Adelaide for our festival in March and it will be interesting to see how the two stack up. Rivalries aside though, it is surely double good fortune that just a cheap internet fare away we in Adelaide can have access to two first rate festivals in less than six months.