

## Murray Bramwell's Reviews

*Appeared in - The Australian*

### **Sleepless Beauty**

Christa Hughes , Imogen Kelly, Ruby May Fox, Minx Contortionista.

Michael Lira, Neill Duncan and Svetlana Bunic

The Space, Adelaide Festival Centre until 9 June.

The Studio, Sydney Opera House 12 - 22 June.

### **The Rat Pack**

Paul McDermott, Mikey Robbins and Sandman

with the Club Luna Band

Festival Theatre

Adelaide Festival Centre

June 8.

It may look like the blitz outside, but in every available performance space inside the Adelaide Festival Centre the joint is jumping. The major removal of the concrete crust that used to be the Centre's Plaza is still continuing but that hasn't deterred the second Adelaide Cabaret Festival with its seventeen day program featuring more than seventy different shows.

First up is Sleepless Beauty, a rocky horror featuring Christa Hughes, lead singer of indie band Machine Gun Fellatio. In this garish fairytale, the besieged blonde is insomniac and there isn't a prince in sight. The subtext, which is about as subtle as a bayonet through the seat of your chair, is the tyranny of body image and the depravity of the beauty industry. Not exactly hot news, but with her witty vocals and deadpan comedy Christa Hughes, in a size eight satin two-piece, gives the show plenty of helium.

Serenaded by retro-radio excerpts and the woozy tunes of an accordion, electronics and rhythm band, Hughes' Beauty swoons, squirms and submits, as she is surgically sculpted and ideologically oppressed. Meanwhile Imogen Kelly, in a pink wig and silvery second skin, shins up a red curtain for gymnastic rope tricks, Minx Contortionista, in dayglo and black, does minxy contortions and Ruby May Fox performs a wonderfully un-co fan dance. It still needs some narrative surgery and quite a lot more self-irony, but with its guignol manner and its mood swing band, this Sleepless Beauty is not only a hoot, it is trying to give the cabaret form a wake up call as well.

The Rat Pack might have trouble recognising themselves in the form of Paul McDermott, Mikey Robbins and Sandman but the Adelaide audience is in raptures anyway. The concept is tuxedos and martinis served to the front row, but the chaotic trio puts paid to all that. McDermott appears

first, winding up the crowd like a mongoose with a jesuit education. Success on television has not meant he has forgotten the Doug Anthony days, even if he is crooning Fly Me to the Moon.

Mikey Robbins is the other good news for the week. Infinitely affable, scabrous towards McDermott and a roly model to all the XXL's in the world, he is a fat man with self-esteem. And then, appearing in a suit that someone refers to as penis pink, Sandman makes us all grateful for whatever social skills we already have.

He is in top form. I am alive and fresh, he beams, and we believe him. He strums electric guitar while Mikey plays snare drum on a newspaper sticking like a sporran out of trousers. Later Robbins plays Love me Tender on a recorder in his right nostril. The man redefines versatility. McDermott sings like an angel at least three times, including a medley which includes I'm Going on Osama Holiday. Sinatra's Rat Pack couldn't hold a filter tip to these drolly native marsupials.