Brink Productions did a good thing encouraging Marty Denniss to revise for the stage his script of the Australian feature film *Erskineville Kings*. Cinema’s gain has also been the theatre’s and the result is *The Duck Shooter*. In this, often harsh play, Denniss follows the fortunes, or otherwise, of a group of young men.

Brothers Barky and Wace are the proverbial chalk and cheese. One is a would-be writer doing the Kerouac thing around the country, the other is dour and dutiful, recently nursing their father in his last days of decline from a debilitating stroke. Also on hand are Coppa, a slightly older fellow who was taken into the family at sixteen after a history of abuse from his own father, and Trunny, a close friend of all three and also their whipping boy and surrogate kid sibling.

*The Duck Shooter* has indeterminate setting and time. This is Australia round about now, but there are few indicators, whether of town or country, or the usual cultural particulars which garnish Australian naturalism. The intention, of course, is to focus on deeper themes of identity and masculinity and show that they are cyclical and generational and, frequently, inescapable.

Director Michael Hill, together with an accomplished cast, maintains intensity without letting the production fall into histrionics. Denniss’s text is salty with profanity, and this will prove an impediment to some audiences, but rough language is not only a part of the culture it describes, it is marbled into its verbal texture. These men are articulate, but their expression is crude, as well as cruelly ironic. As the action unfolds, their protective strategies are torn away and disclosure becomes a weapon.
The performances are evenly good. William Allert brings a nervy vulnerability to Trunny, undervalued and underestimated by the others. Cameron Goodall and Rory Walker work well as the brothers - Goodall’s Barky, creative and free of convention is both derided and envied by Wace, given dimension and depth by the excellent Rory Walker. Coppa is sinister and strangely metaphoric in Denniss’s writing. David Mealor captures well the character’s determination which is both a strength and a desperate attempt to protect what little sanctuary he has created with another man’s family. Mealor also handles some wordy text with acumen. Marty Denniss has written an ambitious script which sometimes over-reaches, but is all the more valiant for doing so.

Robert Cousins’ weatherboard set is literal enough to frame the action but also accommodates lighting designer Geoff Cobham’s near-expressionist sprays of red and green. The Duck Shooter is a welcome return for Brink whose trademark qualities have been scarce in the past two years. This is a strong production and promises much for Marty Denniss as well.