Murray Bramwell’s Reviews

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Projections 1
devised by Peter Finlay

Blowing It
by Stephen Papps and Stephen Sinclair

Festival of One
Bakehouse Theatre

The Festival of One monodrama series has been a fixture at the Bakehouse for a number of years now. Previously, it ran in November but artistic director, Peter Green has, this year, divided it into three seasons in May, July and September. Series Two brings back actor Peter Finlay, well-known to State Theatre and Red Shed audiences, and New Zealand actor, Stephen Papps, returning with a show previously performed in the 2000 Adelaide Fringe.

Projections 1, devised by Peter Finlay and directed by Lloyd Jones, takes as its source the cinema. But, as the notes inform us - “this production recoils from the multi-million dollar extravaganzas that provide... the text.” Instead it offers excerpts, speeches and vignettes and the unvarnished presence of the actor. Mannered from the moment Finlay takes the stage, in black threads and white plimsolls, Projections 1 gestures solemnly towards its origins but never properly defines the relationship.

It is one thing to present Captain Willard’s voiceover from Apocalypse Now or the famous “Napalm in the Morning” speech, or Kurtz quoting The Hollow Men, but what are we to make of Finlay’s (often impressive) effort to reproduce the vocal details of Martin Sheen, Robert Duvall, Marlon Brando and even, God spare us, the demented cadences of Dennis Hopper? The effect is bewildering when it should be theatrically engaging. This seems more like channeling than acting and, rather than separating the text from its original context, it constantly invites comparison. It would have been far bolder, and more theatrically ‘alienating’ to have dispensed with the mimicry and accents so that we consider the words on their own merit.

Instead, we have some twenty scenes, including mighty moments from Star Wars, The Terminator, Silence of the Lambs, A Few Good Men, In the Line of Fire and lumps of Pulp Fiction, culminating with some ultra violence to a
wheelbarrow. Sean Connery is prominent - as a Highlander initially, and later as Odysseus. “They told me they would bring me to sunny Ithaca,” says a simulacrum of the burred voice of James Bond, “and they did not.”

Peter Finlay’s Projections 1 may be canvassing the fact that neither Willard nor Darth Vader, the Terminator or Tarantino’s Vincent got to sunny Ithaca either, but the idea is nowhere near clear enough and, instead, we are left only with random impressions.

Stephen Papps’ Blowing It is also a play for voices, but the farrago of characters -

an undercover narcotics cop Mike Fahey aka Sam, a criminal fringe with names like Titch, Weasel, Speedo, and even a rottweiler called Satan - is energetically integrated by a tight script and an even more disciplined performance. Papps is a skilled actor and his movement is crisp and the differentiation of characters adept.

Blowing It explores the blurred line between crime and the law and the ambiguous territory for undercover agents who pose as criminals in order to uncover their associates. The familiar themes of loyalty and betrayal are here and with the character of Titch, Papps shows mateship turned to dobship. None of this is very new but the mix of comedy, gusto and incident is engaging and surprisingly detailed.

Too much so at times. The central story of Mike’s decline, sampling more and more of the product that he is supposed to use as a decoy, is strong enough. But the sheer task of keeping so many characters and subplots in motion becomes over-frenetic. Stephen Papps and collaborator Stephen Sinclair might have trimmed the text in order to make the best ideas count.

Series Three of the Festival of One, The Getaway Bus by Ingle Knight, opens at the Bakehouse on September 1.