

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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The Pleasure of Their Company

Shaun Micallef and Glynn Nicholas

The Arts Theatre

There have been plenty of comedy double acts in recent times - HG and Roy, John Clarke and Bryan Dawe, Mick Molloy and Tony Martin, to name just a few. But, on first glance, Glynn Nicholas and Shaun Micallef seem an unlikely combination. For a start, Nicholas has forged a very successful career as a solo comic with a memorable range of signature characters and impressive physical skills. Shaun Micallef, on the other hand, has for some time featured in television - in sketch comedy, the sitcom *Welcher and Welcher* and with a Tonight Show whose demise, many thought, had more to do with ratings panic than any lack of merit.

For two such high profile comics, with quite divergent careers, to collaborate may come as a surprise but, if *The Pleasure of Their Company* is any indication, the idea is an inspired one. Co-written by the performers, it has Nicholas and Micallef each doing what they do best, as well as combining for some quite outstanding sketch material. From the opening minutes it is clear that each is playing to his strengths - Nicholas providing an understated, almost straight, role while Micallef creates the comic turbulence. It is Nicholas, dapper in his tux, who is ready to start the show while Micallef blows in, late for his cue and apparently bewildered in front of an audience which he then turns on with almost Cleese-like disdain.

After a ferocious parody of *Blowin in the Wind*, with Nicholas on guitar and Micallef on eyebrows, the latter returns for a solo turn as the English actor Nigel String. Like the best of Micallef's comedy, it takes his matinee good looks and mellifluous voice and unravels into patent absurdity as he introduces a prompt who is not in the wings after all, a childhood devotion to *Black Beauty*, recollections of Mae West and a demonstration of his prowess in "the Scottish play" - as one of the trees in Burnham Wood.

It is witty stuff which is neatly matched by Nicholas in his mischievous alias Pate Biscuit. For many, the satiric connection is now lost` but like Peter Sellers' Aunty Rotter, she has become an archetype. With her whim of iron, Ms Biscuit, in black wig and floral dress, has the audience on its feet doing contorted pilates exercises, while the very fetching

accompanist, Ms Carrie Barr, is forced to perform with her head in a bag to minimise any rivalry with the star. Another Nicholas favourite, Sergeant Smith - the not very long arm but very large girth, of the law - is hilariously reprised (complete with his trademark "-ings") and reprimanded by Micallef as a starchy senior officer

Glynn Nicholas's flair for working a crowd is evident in several extended mime improvs - one where he plays waiter to a young woman from the audience and another where he directs, using only kazoo noises, three more "volunteers" in an imaginary flea circus. It is deft comedy, cool and carefully nuanced. As are two of the wittiest sketches - when Lou Gehrig goes to the doctor to discover he has his own disease and the Peter Cook and Dudley Moore-style dialogue of the elderly pensioner father (played with shameless pathos by Nicholas) being berated by his well-to-do lawyer son (Micallef at his swinish best)

After a seemingly endless succession of dishevelled, hit-and-miss, stand-up merchants, the carefully crafted theatrics and often brilliant scripting of *The Pleasure of Their Company* is a welcome departure for Australian comedy. It is rare to see two performers work so well for combined comic effect - when Micallef appears as the preposterous Milo singing, Quazimodo-like, choruses of *Something Stupid*, Nicholas is the unflappable foil, as he is in the barbershop mime where Micallef causes even more thespian mayhem.

This show has, so far, only played Adelaide and Perth. It deserves a much wider audience and I hope it finds it. Not only would they, like us, greatly enjoy the pleasure of their company, they would see that Glynn Nicholas and Shaun Micallef seem to be having an excellent time themselves.