

Review - The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek: Dark but effective humour

By Eric Scott for Absolute Theatre, February 15, 2018



Above (from left) John Batchelor, Julian Curtis, Emily Weir and Kimie Tsukakoshi. Image by Dylan Evans

Kathryn Marquet's new play is something completely different. It has more shades than a camouflaged chameleon but it shows that her penchant for wicked comedy has not diminished. It is filled with some of the darkest humour I've seen on stage for a long time.

But as an audience member said to me afterwards: "What was that?"

Was it a black comedy? A psychological hostage drama? A "save the planet" documentary? It was all those things and more.

It is set in real time. In Tasmania a pair of wilderness rangers, George Templeton and Harris Robb, who are working to protect the Tasmanian Devil from extinction have found animals that are immune to a cancerous virus. Then someone kills the animals.

George, who is a girl by the way, was excellently played by **Emily Weir**. It was a role completely different from her professional debut as the stickybeaked sexy maid Dorine in *Tartuffe*, which won her a couple of Matilda Awards.

She is on stage as the play opens, nursing a baby Devil. Enter Harris, played with comic flair by **Julian Curtis**.

She tells him she shot the man who killed the devils and his body is in the bathroom. This is Irish rogue Mickey O'Toole played with a totally understandable Irish accent by **John Batchelor**.

Harris goes into an hilarious panic mode as he tries to work out a plan to keep George out of jail. Then Mickey returns to life and things change as we try to work out if Mickey is a good guy or a bad guy.

So with the mood changing rapidly from pure comedy to long lectures on ecology, climate change, human impact on animals, Pauline Hanson and the Adani coal mine - in fact any green cause you can name (George has opinions on them all) – it was difficult to get a full grasp of the action, too much was going on.

But the script has been cleverly edited so that we get all of her causes in short form. Even so, there was still a bit too much lecturing for my taste. Then, just when you think it is going get boring, we meet **Kimie Tsukakoshi's** Destinee Lee. She has become lost in the bush.

What a fabulous beautifully drawn character she is; an Aussie born Asian One Nation member who believes that Australia is being overrun by Muslims, that the earth is flat and that Pauline Hanson is a saviour.

Kimie is pure magic on stage and had the audience in constant bursts of laughter.

As the play moves on the comedy gets darker and almost Pythonesque when chicken nuggets become the centre of the tale!

The pre-show warnings come with a mention of bodily fluids – take that as a warning for the on stage result of the dire effects of poisoned meat in Destinee's cramping stomach.

It is a darkly funny play, with an even darker twist at the end, but I had problems with too strong messages, too much shouting and too many injections if the F-word.

I know that is the way young people talk today, and I understand the striving for authenticity by young writers, but the F word is sharp aggressive, intrusive, and ugly sounding; too many inserts completely cripple the rhythm and structure of speech patterns. If characters use the same words all the time they tend to sound the same.

Just a thought.



La Boite Artistic Director Todd MacDonald with La Boite founder member Muriel Watson.
Image by Deanne Scott



Playwright Kathryn Marquet with Eric Scott. Image by Deanne Scott



Playlab Artistic Director and director of the play Ian Lawson. Image by Deanne Scott