

ONE THE BEAR Review by Alexandra McCallum

One the Bear uses hip hop, fur and allegory to reflect on identity, discrimination, strength and celebrity



Image by Dylan Evans Photography

One the Bear uses hip hop, fur and allegory to reflect on identity, discrimination, strength and celebrity. Two bears – One and Ursula – navigate an alternate universe in which they are simultaneously hunted for their bile and see tails become a fashion statement amongst the “fleshies” or non-bears.

One (Candy Bowers) feels the weight of her dying mother’s request to speak up on behalf of bear kind, and when her music goes viral she hopes celebrity status will provide her with a platform to make change. Maintaining her sense of furriness only gets more complex once she enters the music industry however, and Ursula (Nancy Denis) at first despairs at who her friend is becoming.

A key to the success the writing is its ability to both let us see the parallels with our own world and, at the same time, suspend our disbelief about the world on stage. A huge amount of visceral detail – from blunted claws to drug trips – works along with the set design (Jason Wing) and costumes (Sarah Seahorse) to make this possible.

The combination of dialogue in rhyme and fast paced compositions and sound design from Busty Beatz allow a complex story to be told with considerable economy. This did cause some issues early in the performance when pacing and transitions between sections could have been more defined. The performers re-established their rhythm however and projections (Optikal Bloc) and lighting (Verity Hampson) also helped to maintain the productions’ stadium concert energy. The projection of skeletons is particularly atmospheric.

The show is a co-production between Black Honey Company (co-directed by self-described 'black-feminist dreamers' Candy and Kim "Busty Beatz" Bowers), Campeltown Arts Centre and La Boite. It is aimed at teen audiences; and particularly at those who may be struggling to define themselves in a world which, because of their cultural or other identities, wants to do the job for them. Teens from a variety of backgrounds participated in workshops which feed into the ideas into the process alongside the experiences of the artistic team. The interweaving of story and themes is skilfully handled so as not to become earnest. At one point Nancy Denis breaks a moment by biting into an apple.

Judging by the standing ovation from many of the young people present on opening night, the performance was a success. If you have teens in your life, take them with you. Especially if they happen to have fur.

4 ½ stars out of 5

About the author

Alexandra McCallum is a writer, theatremaker, storyteller and community cultural development facilitator. She has co-written two touring schools productions, and designed, facilitated and managed youth arts projects since 2004. Work for adult audiences has had readings at Metro Arts and the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts and has appeared in the Best of Bareknuckle Poet, Lowdown Magazine and Brisbane Modern. She has performed at storytelling festivals and events around Australia. She is currently completing a novel manuscript through a PhD in Creative Writing at Griffith University.