



Snow White

GILLIAN WILLS

A gothic, murderous remake of an enduring fairy tale.



Kanen Breen and Silvia Colloca in Snow White. Photograph via La Boite Theatre Company.

Bold, brilliant, raw and at times plain silly, this music-cum-theatre piece could just as well be called 'Fifty Shades of Red' because there's a generous spill of it in this gothic, murderous remake of an enduring fairy tale. For a start, there's a massive scarlet stain in the stage's centre and the Queen (Silvia Colloca) sports a red, decadent vaudeville cloak and silky number slashed to the top of her thigh. And Kanen Breen's crimson, shimmery lip gloss for his role as narrator is another. On the blood-red floor, the Queen and the six-pack, boasting hunk of a Huntsman, Michael Tuahine, get down and dirty. Just one of the reasons, the program warns, 'leave your children' at home.

Just as well Grimm's indestructible tale continues to fascinate and its good bones make it withstand constant reinvention because in this grungy remake *Snow White*, believably conjured by Stephanie Pickett, as a pubertal, seductive schemer fights back and those seven dwarfs have left the building.

Breen is deliciously nasty and making the mirror the story teller is inspired. Breen oozes malevolence as a controlling, manipulative emcee. His incarnation more than doffs a cap to Joel Grey's performance in *Cabaret* with a pinch of the *Rocky Horror Show* and a dash of Iago from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Nothing is more satisfying than watching a tongue-in-cheek, mischief-making meddler do his worst and as evil supreme he nails it.

When the Queen asks the mirror who is the 'fairest' and it's Snow White, a cyclonic killing spree begins. Mezzo-soprano Colloca is brilliant as the conflicted, narcissistic Queen and steals the show. As singer and actor she mesmerises and with her rich, versatile voice of a huge range and capacity to belt she does Zulya Kamalova's eclectic, changeable score proud. One of the most stunning moments is Colloca's wailing, wordless, keening singing as she grieves for her daughter.

And the musical quartet – with Steve Russell as Music Director, Kathryn McKee, Mikael Strand and Angus Wilson – does an admirable job with the colourful, Greek chorusing score and its multiple style swings from rock to opera to classical, reggae and more besides.

Hurrah for Hume, Miller and Kamalova in taking risks, that's what Festivals should be about, and, for giving the syrupy Ms White a dark makeover. There are many positives yet the show feels like a work-in-progress. The exciting

promise and dramatic arc which muscles up in the first half sags somewhat in the second. The Huntsman's serenade comes across as superfluous, and as for the ending, well come along and make up your own mind. Despite the flaws and cheesy riffs about apples this *Snow White* is unquestionably engaging.

Rating: 3 stars out of 5

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Presented by Opera Queensland and La Boite Theatre Company

As Part of The Brisbane Festival

Created and devised by Lindy Hume, Suzie Miller and Zulya Kamilova

CAST & CREATIVES

Writer Suzie Miller Composer Zulya Kamalova Director Lindy Hume Set Designer Sarah Winter Costume Designer Karen Cochet Lighting Designer Ben Hughes Musical Director Stephen Russell Arranger/Orchestrator Thomas Green Dramaturg Glyn Roberts Cast includes Kanen Breen, Silvia Colloca, Stephanie Pickett & Michael Tuahine

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What the stars mean?

- **Five stars:** Exceptional, unforgettable, a must see
 - **Four and a half stars:** Excellent, definitely worth seeing
 - **Four stars:** Accomplished and engrossing but not the best of its kind
 - **Three and a half stars:** Good, clever, well made, but not brilliant
 - **Three stars:** Solid, enjoyable, but unremarkable or flawed
 - **Two and half stars:** Neither good nor bad, just adequate
 - **Two stars:** Not without its moments, but ultimately unsuccessful
 - **One star:** Awful, to be avoided
 - **Zero stars:** Genuinely dreadful, bad on every level
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gillian Wills is a freelance arts writer and music reviewer for ArtsHub, Limelight, the Australian, The Courier Mail and Townsville Bulletin. Her memoir Elvis and Me: How a world-weary musician and a broken racehorse rescued each other, Finch Publishing, was released in America, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand in January, 2016.