

## The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek

Stage Whispers review by Kiesten McCauley



The excited Valentine's Day crowd at opening night of this world-premiere production were wooed by *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*. People were screeching with laughter at the outrageous comedic dialogue one moment, pin-drop quiet the next as seething tensions rose among the characters.

This black comedy sees environmental scientist Georgina working with Harris, a park ranger, in an isolated shack in Tasmania. Georgina is trying to save the Tasmanian devil population from deadly tumours and she's close to a breakthrough when an encounter with Mickey O'Toole turns their world upside-down. Amid violence, chaos and panic, enters lost schoolgirl Destinee Lee just to shake things up even more and challenge Georgina's principles.

It's always a special delight to experience how relatable Australian stories are on stage and this play certainly delivered. While once or twice the script by Kathryn Marquet suffered from prolix, it was beautifully paced, with secrets, lies and motivations being revealed at the perfect moments. The mood throughout was suspenseful, thrilling and laugh-out-loud funny. There was a mix of base humour for the groundlings and clever concepts for everyone else. Those not of a left-wing nature might find the play's political ideologies a little hard to stomach; while the lefties might be inspired to rise up and start a revolution to save the planet. This is a fast-paced, thought provoking piece of theatre with never a dull moment.

The actors were all very well rehearsed and showed good teamwork on opening night. Every character developed and changed during the 100+ minutes. Kimie Tsukakoshi (Destinee) took some bold risks and committed to a farcical style of comedy. Emily Weir (Georgina), while occasionally slipping into self-consciousness, relished the role of the militant environmentalist. She was especially brave and convincing during her final scene with John Batchelor (Mickey). John delivered an incredibly focussed and believable characterisation, nailing the Irish accent and unpredictable psychopath role at all times. Julian Curtis (Harris) also mastered his New Zealander accent, with almost every line he spoke garnering masses of laughter from the sold-out theatre stalls.

The slightly surreal effect of the angled stage and joinery on the set was a great metaphor for the state of the characters' lives. The dilapidated roof and the crooked doors also had a certain artistic beauty to them. Lighting effects were subtle and unobtrusive, with some nice

uses of gobos. Direction by Ian Lawson was cleverly seamless; he allowed the script, crew and actors to shine.

This play is an important response to a modern age fraught with misinformation and mistrust. The tale woven inspires lasting reflection in its audience by calling out absurd phenomena like the flat earth movement, in comparison to noble causes such as animal rights and the tragedy of extinction. The memorable lines of dialogue were too many to count, with fabulous comedic notes peppered throughout a mood tempered with in-your-face social commentary.

*Kiesten McCauley*

Photographer: Dylan Evans