

## La Boite Theatre review: The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek

By Phil Brown, Arts Editor, The Courier-Mail  
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IF you want to be shocked and horrified and scandalised in equal measure I can thoroughly recommend *The Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*.

This co-production by Playlab, presented by La Boite and written by Kathryn Marquet, is a revelation. And, hell, any production that begins with a ghostly image of the Tasmanian tiger flickering across the scenery has me from the get go. Because I believe the reputedly extinct Thylacine is still out there, deep in the Tassie wilderness (along with the Yowie and the Bunyip) which is where this rather remarkable play is set.

At the outset though, let me warn you that if you don't like mud, blood, shit and serious cussing – steer clear. I thought Queensland Theatre's first offering for the year, *Black is The New White* was out there with the F-bombs and the C-word but this production blows them out of the water in the foulness department.



Kimie Tsukakoshi and Julian Curtis in the *Dead Devils of Cockle Creek*.

Now it's hard to tell you what it's about without giving the game away, and I don't want to do that. But let's just say I got more, so much more, than I bargained for and full marks to the

cast whom I interviewed a few weeks ago. They spoke in general terms so that while I knew the sort of territory they might be dealing with I couldn't have guessed what actually would happen.

The setting is perfect, a perfect place for a story that is a cross between *Deliverance* and any number of Harold Pinter or Samuel Beckett plays.

Emily Weir stars as George, a ranger who is trying to single-handedly save the Tasmanian devil. She shares the ranger's hut with Harris Robb who may have smoked one too many bongos but is not about to stop anytime soon.

Their mysterious and somewhat unwanted guest is an Irish crim called Mickey O'Toole played by John Batchelor and how he fits into the picture is not my place to explain.

Let me just say that he's Beelzebub incarnate. A later addition is Kimie Tsukakoshi, who plays Destinee Lee, a schoolgirl lost in the bush who wishes she hadn't wandered into this particular ranger's hut.



Kimie Tsukakoshi and John Batchelor on stage.

So what happens? Let's just say that everything goes to hell and quickly in a descent into madness and mayhem that has a weird logic to it. Central to the horror (the horror! The horror!) is John Batchelor's character and let me say that Batchelor is utterly brilliant in this

piece and his talent for seesawing between pure evil and a kind of good-fearing good humour is something to behold. To use his own terminology, he's fecking great.

Marquet's script is deliciously rich and there are so many memorable and often Pinteresque lines as she explores everything from climate change to religion and even chicken nuggets. The play is big on chicken nuggets.

But I can't say too much else without spoiling it. You may or may not know that I'm a tough audience and hard to please at the theatre but I was riveted by this piece. I found the characters utterly believable and Emily Weir in particular. This is her second major role and she is really going places. Julian Curtis is hilarious and his comic turn as a stoner ranger is fab. And Kimie Tsukakoshi is very endearing ... until she disgraces herself.

So if you're not too easily offended you may, like me, enjoy the darkly cathartic experience on offer.