

THE COURIER MAIL

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It's short and profane which is just the way we like our theatre

Packed with F-bombs, this Brisbane Festival “family comedy” is more South Park than The Brady Bunch. It's sharp, sassy and hilarious, but if you can't handle the French then you should probably keep the f--k away, writes Phil Brown.

Phil Brown, Arts Editor, The Courier-Mail

IF YOU don't f---ing like swearing well keep the f--k away from this play.

It's as profane as an episode of *The Jerry Springer Show* although in Springer they used to beep the F-bombs.

Not in *From Darkness*, Steven Oliver's sassy and rather fascinating play which had its world premiere at La Boite last night and runs throughout Brisbane Festival.

Oliver is a writer, singer, dancer and all around talent who has created a rough diamond with this play directed by Isaac Drandic.

I say rough diamond because it might need a bit of tweaking and may take a few days to settle in properly.

But the essence of a very enjoyable 70 minutes was there and the brevity of the production marked it up in my books immediately.

That's about the right length for this intense, funny, sad and mystifying affair.

I say mystifying because as well as being a family comedy that is more *South Park* than *The Brady Bunch*, it's a story that explores Aboriginal spirituality and the idea that spirits live with us in an adjacent dimension and can influence us and our daily lives.

That ghostly notion is an interesting one and it is transmitted with some rather interesting visual effects.

The indigenous family portrayed is in crisis after the suicide of a son.

For the cast and writer this is a serious issue and how the family comes to terms with their grief is central to the story.

That doesn't sound funny, does it?

But while there are serious matters to be discussed the play is often a hoot with some killer one-liners.

Lisa Maza plays Abigail, the mum who is drinking to mask her grief. Colin Smith is her husband Eric who has become distant from his wife since their boy died. Benjin Maza is Preston the son left behind by his brother and Preston is the one experiencing strange visitations. His sister, Akira is played by Ebony McGuire who is the personification of sassy.

And veteran local thespian Roxanne McDonald makes a welcome return to the stage as Nanna Lou, the potty-mouthed grandmother from hell.

It was Tolstoy who wrote “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” and that is personified by this mob. They fight like cats and dogs and the F-bombs fly freely throughout but it’s funny rather than offensive as they battle to come to terms with their loss with a little help from the spirit world.

Oliver won a legion of fans as an actor and writer on ABC TV’s biting and brilliant *Black Comedy* sketch show and in June he premiered his autobiographical stage show, *Bigger and Blacker*, to critical and audience acclaim at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival.

I ran into him after exiting the theatre (I’m usually the first one out) and he was pacing outside like a nervous father waiting outside a delivery room. I felt I had to tell him that the baby was doing fine and it is. Okay it needs a little tightening and the actors seem to be still coming to grips with it but the heart and humour and mysticism won me over completely. Shame about the f---ing swearing though.

FROM DARKNESS - 4 stars