

Short & Sweet: Newtown Week 3

Written by Maz Dixon

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Newtown Theatre, Sydney

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Lifetime

?Two strangers meet and on impulse decide to get 'married' and live out married life over the course of a few minutes. They invent problems for themselves to "add some dramatic tension", such as fertility problems, war and general domestic malaise. An occasionally whimsical piece that never really flies, as it feels more like a laundry list of Major Life Events than a life actually being lived.



Endure

?The programme informs us that this play is based on "real events". Two friends correspond by email and have never met in the flesh. They are both troubled people, but writer/director Renee Thomas never gives us a real sense of their problems. There's mention of one 'cutting' herself, while another is being treated for depression – it's all effect, no cause. A bit more background to the characters would help engender more sympathy. As it is, all we're given are some very Emo characters flailing around, telling concerned friends that "You! Don't! Understand!"

In My Shoes

?Two mothers have each had a child abducted. One is a wealthy westerner whose child was taken from her room in a resort; the other is a poor woman who can barely raise the interest of the village police in trying to locate her missing daughter. Angela Phippen's script is thought-provoking, but strays occasionally into heavy-handed cliché. The privileged mother is portrayed as someone who can summon the media with a click of her fingers to publicise her plight. Her case is clearly based on Madeline McCann, but in real life the media, far from being supportive of the McCanns, relentlessly pursued them with allegations that they had killed their own daughter. Excellent performances by Kirsty Kiloh and Martha Ibrahim.

The Urban Jungle

?Comedy is hard. The government's sometimes ineffectual efforts to get the word out to kids about drink and drugs being bad for you must seem like easy pickings to budding humour writers, but it's easy to become complacent. Spirited performances from all the actors involved, and there are a couple of good jokes. Overall the whole scenario is too silly to really get off the ground, and the message that "kids will do it no matter what you say" is a bit of a cop-out.

Something to do With Toads

?A short play about a nice young lady trying to get her boyfriend to open up with a bit of Ecstasy. I guess she doesn't pay attention to those government ads. While Bec Wood puts in a nice comic performance, the piece ultimately suffers from banality masquerading as deep insight. When the big revelation is the boyfriend sagely observing that it takes a long time to get to know someone, it's enough to make you want to reach for an ecstasy yourself.

Shit Happens

?The most intriguing play of the evening. Romeo awaits his turn to be judged over an untimely death. Writer Lech Mackiewicz gives us a tragic figure having an internal dialogue with himself – at least I think that's why he's played by two actors who mirror each other's actions almost perfectly. Matt Driller and Tom Pelik (who co-directs with Mackiewicz) are great – sweaty, dishevelled, trying their best to play out their defence in a toilet cubicle, as you do. Definitely my pick of the night.

Perception

?An all too familiar tale of unrequited love, as a young woman initially fails to realise that her crush enjoys checking out other boys as much as she does. Humiliation and anger follow, followed by acceptance. With dialogue such as "I wasn't stupid for loving him, I was stupid for hating him!", Perception doesn't really add any great insights into the nature of love and sexuality.

I Want to be a Miracle

?A monologue by a young woman with Daddy issues. While Natalia Ladyko puts in a genuinely lovely performance, her script is less than riveting. It ended up taking us somewhere interesting, but took such a long detour through such countries as 'Married Men I Have Known and Loved', it was hard to care in the end.

Double Take?

This is one of those plays where you get to witness the dissonance between what people say and what they really mean. Writer Rose Cooper explores this by having two characters in a singles bar spell out to the audience exactly what they really mean. Hint: They're gagging for it! Having this explained at the end of each and every sentence wears thin very quickly.

Vienna Syndrome

?Comedy is hard. Taking pot shots at the advertising industry by having them brainstorm over ideas for a kidnapping business might seem like a good idea, but you might want to consider going deeper than "Look at these advertising execs – they're amoral! And they're jerks who use wank words!" Look, we all know that advertising execs – indeed, high flyers in any industry – tend to be jerks who use wank words. But illustrating this by having your characters put together a campaign for something morally reprehensible – and illegal – is something that's been done time and time again.