

The House of Dreaming, Melbourne Festival

Stephanie Glickman

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THE ARENA THEATRE COMPANY'S "THE HOUSE OF DREAMING". PICTURE: PIA JOHNSON SUPPLIED

INTERACTIVE theatre challenges audiences to leave comfortable chairs and physically enter performances.

With Arena Theatre Company's *The House of Dreaming* kids are enthusiastically getting into the act.

In fact, it helps to be small considering the amount of crawling through furniture, ducking into tight spaces and plopping down on beds that visitors will experience as they tour through a labyrinthine house.

Cloaked in capes and holding special talismans, trios navigate a fantastical domicile both realistic and surreal.

Occasionally they encounter a flesh-and-blood actor whose storytelling hints at a slowly unfolding narrative.

The physical pathway requires some sleuthing. It's not always apparent where to go next and participants must take the initiative and figure it out for themselves.

Themes of origami, botany, babies and dreams weave a consistent thread, as do complex interactive video systems (by Paul Lim and Matthew Gardiner) that converse with visitors.



THE HOUSE OF DREAMING

Despite all the details -- small furnishings, contents of drawers, ringing telephones -- *The House of Dreaming* feels most satisfyingly integrated when audience spends time with a live actor.

These brief and infrequent meetings offer a human connection that no amount of technology or props can replicate.

Director Chris Kohn and his extensive team, including designer Danielle Brustman and lighting designer Richard Vabre, have conquered logistics too complex to comprehend with a surprisingly clean result.

As the show wears in and more and more bodies leave their own traces, it will evolve from house to home.

Leave shoes at the door and jump inside.

THE HOUSE OF DREAMING

Arena Theatre Company, Melbourne Festival

Lawler Studio, MTC Theatre, until tomorrow (Saturday, October 27).

Rating: ★★★½