

## Moth By [Simon Tate](#) ArtsHub | Friday, August 05, 2011

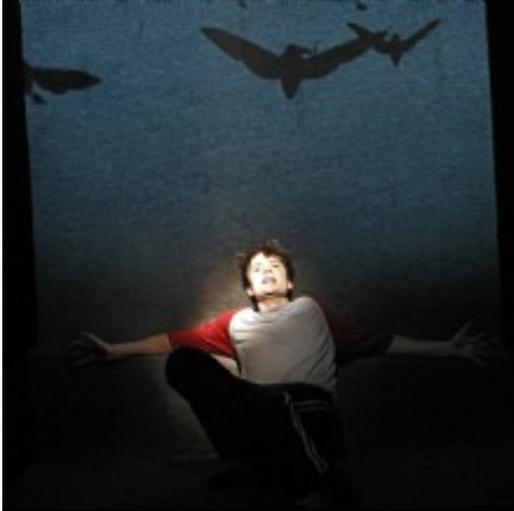


Photo: Jeff Busby

*Then for the teeming quietest, happiest days of all!*

*The brooding and blissful halcyon days!*

- Walt Whitman

What the hell did Whitman remember of his days as a teenager? A young, arguably gay man in an era of severe repression, a poet, an outcast – what were these happiest, halcyon days? Teeming and brooding yes, but surely the rose tint of hindsight is the only thing that would make anyone believe that their teenage years were blissful.

*Moth* is a much better representation – not by any means the experience of the majority, but to some degree, one with which almost every teenager could identify or come close to. Just like the real experience *at the time* of being a teenager, *Moth* is raw, absurd, uncompromising, confusing, painful, frenetic, emotional, funny and harrowing. Like a lot of the teenagers I know it blurs the line between real life and fantasy, perception and interpretation, the expected and the inevitable, what's inside the head and its clumsy translation into the world.

Sebastian (Thomas Conroy) is the world's whipping boy. A thin, arguably gay, 15 year old boy with an odd sense of humour into anime, befriended only by Claryssa (Sarah Ogden), a Wiccan, emo, art-freak only slightly more popular than himself, Sebastian doesn't stand much of a chance.

As writer Declan Greene says in the program notes, some kids "aren't bullied because they're gay ... because they wear glasses, or they're too smart, or sing in Glee club. They're bullied because they're dumb. Or ugly. Or poor. Or annoying. They're bullied because they're easy to hate, and people are lazy, so that's what they do."

A night drinking down at the cricket nets, an unexpected advance and even more unexpected attack by his social betters and moral inferiors leaves Sebastian friendless, beaten, humiliated, but in possession of a strange moth in a jar and possessed by a

religious vision in which he must save mankind from the apocalypse. The fervour and belief instilled in Sebastian that he has been chosen and made something special however, is only exacerbated by a Facebook attack, the withdrawal of his only friend, and the slow deterioration of his connection with the world as he once knew it. I am loathe to make the connection, but there is a disjointed, 'what is reality/what is fantasy' degeneration to an inevitable conclusion that was reminiscent of Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko*. However I would say *Moth* was slicker, less aggrandized, and unlike many stories told about 'real teens', less self-indulgent.

This is an impeccably told piece. Sharp, witty and colloquially poetic dialogue flies between these two superb actors who bounce between a number of different roles, real and perceived, in a way that shows precision directing from Chris Kohn. It is so obvious when you see a production where the writer and director have collaborated closely, as every moment, every change is stripped back to its essence and yet allowed its life at the same time.

Conroy and Ogden's work is beautiful considering how easy it would be to generalise these characters, yet both bring such a depth to each that you not only go with them through their fantasy, but feel the tension within them when the worlds they escape to come crumbling down.

Jonathan Oxlade's design is, like so much of his beautiful work, deceptively simple. Three spills of what seems like carpet underlay allow multiple scenes and perspectives to happen simultaneously while being versatile enough to be any place, suggesting a barrier or muffling of everything outside this current universe, while also providing clever opportunities for Rachel Burke's extremely tight and clever lighting design.

This production is an incredible ride and one that gives an insight into the possibilities that exist in teen culture today without sanitising, patronising or playing to the moral majority. It demands the audience come with it, but never once leaves them behind, although you may feel buffeted and out of breath by the end.

This is an incredibly short season for such a great show, Brisbane! Stop reading and go book tickets. Now. It is the sort of theatre that you will remember and the sort of theatre that you need to see.

### **Rating: Four and a half stars**

#### ***Moth***

An Arena Theatre/Malthouse Theatre co-production

Writer: Declan Greene

Director: Chris Kohn

Designer: Jonathan Oxlade

Composer: Jethro Woodward

Lighting Design: Rachel Burke

Video Design: 21-19 (Domenico Bartolo)

Dramaturge: Maryanne Lynch

Production Manager: Rebecca Moore

Performed by: Thomas Conroy and Sarah Ogden



Brisbane Powerhouse Visy Theatre  
August 3 – 6

### **Simon Tate**

SIMON TATE is a teacher, director and performer currently teaching at The Queensland Academy for Creative Industries and Associate Director of Vanguard Youth Theatre. Simon has trained with QUT, The Qld Shakespeare Ensemble, Maitre D'Armes Gary Worsfield, Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre and The SITI Company (New York ). He specializes in training and directing young people having taught for Education Queensland, Zen Zen Zo (Education Manager 2003-2007) and QUT. He has created work with young people including In God We Trust (2010), The House of Bernarda Alba (2009), Trojan Women 2.0 (2008), The Immortals (2008/2009/2010), Sotoba Komachi (2006), Medea (2005), Antigone (2004), XL-D Express/ The Mayne Inheritance (2003). Performance credits include Dracula, The Odyssey (Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre), The Breakfast Club (QANGO Productions), Twelfth Night (Power of Will), Desire Lines (International AIDS day), Reservoir Dogs, Hurley Burley, Psycho (Armadean Players), La Bamba (La Boite), West Side Story, Pirates of Penzance (Beenleigh Theatre Company).  
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