



INFORMER ARTS = MOTH

Hearts A-Flutter

ZENOBIA FROST chats with SARAH OGDEN, a Brisbane actor returning home to explore her roots in MOTH.

Few of us are spared the memory (and perhaps nightmares) of being 16 and the school freak – or at least feeling like it. Puberty had a mysterious hold over our bodies, our relationships – it had time-twisting abilities. These, in hindsight, might make high school seem like a chaotic soup of instability, both mental and physical. Writer Declan Greene's play – exploring teenage mental illness, religious zeal and love – has struck a chord with audiences of all ages. Now, this Green Room Award-winning production wings its way to Brisbane after selling out a second season at The Malthouse in Melbourne in 2010.

Sarah Ogden reprises the role of Claryssa, a young woman who is "looking for something to identify with and somewhere to belong." Ogden was born and raised in Brisbane, but was drawn to the lights of Melbourne to follow her passion for acting after a theoretical theatre-studies degree at QUT. She's thrilled to be able to perform on a local stage for Moth, particularly considering her connection with both her character and the city of Brisbane.

Identifying with Claryssa, Ogden says that she "wasn't quite a goth, but all my friends were, so I played along." Details in the script – a doona cover decorated with the signs of the zodiac, candles, incense – echoed Ogden's own teenage days. In homage, Claryssa wears the Docs Ogden used to wear when she was 16. "We even went out and bought purple laces like I used to wear back then," says Ogden.

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Perhaps it's the actors' strong identification with their characters that helps these fictional teens transcend the realm of Hollywood high school stereotypes. "The relationships the characters have with each other are very genuine," says Ogden. "Within the show, Claryssa and Sebastian also play other characters – their mothers, a teacher they both hate, the school bully – so you see their perspective of other people first-hand."

The show itself is set in a "meta-theatrical space – a kind of nowhere space" in which the two characters "replay and re-imagine" a particularly traumatic instance of bullying that takes place before the play begins. Sebastian, Claryssa's only friend, "is already a little fragile and unstable." When the bullying triggers a psychotic episode for Sebastian, "you experience his world breaking down around him and you feel Claryssa's powerlessness."

Ogden looks forward to staging Moth in the Powerhouse's intimate Visy Theatre. "It's going to feel very close and personal," she says. "It's a show that makes the audience work." Skipping back and forth in time, "the audience works to put together the pieces and figure out what's going on." There's the mystery of Sebastian's sudden illness, Claryssa's sudden disappearance, and – almost in her place – the sudden appearance of a moth in a jar by Sebastian's bed. The audience will join Claryssa and Sebastian on a breathless journey that "shifts from really funny to really quite serious and touching," fraught with passion and, above all, the tyranny of youth.

MOTH runs at BRISBANE POWERHOUSE
from Wednesday Aug 3 to Saturday
Aug 6. Ph: 3358 8600 / www.brisbanepowerhouse.org