

Carnegie 18: New Music Theatre Series

Submitted by Emily Mercurio on Tuesday, 31st Jan 2012

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The world of musical theatre is an ever-expanding one. Each year we see new shows opening, revivals being staged, original musicals being workshopped and successful shows touring around the world. Musical theatre never sits still long enough to stagnate, as it's constantly reinventing itself with every step it makes.

Unfortunately, this innovation doesn't always happen close to home. While Melbourne can now boast to being potentially the best theatre hub in Australia, it still pales in comparison to places like Broadway and West End where the competition is fierce but new shows are nurtured and supported. We should be very proud of Melbourne's theatrical development in recent times. We're seeing big musicals come here every year, and we're even beginning to bring successful foreign plays here, such as *Warhorse*. But the local struggling writers of original Australian works aren't always being given the chance to shine. Which is why a program like *Carnegie 18* is so encouraging across the board.

Carnegie 18 New Music Theatre Series is only in its second year, but already it is making a difference to the innovative writers of new theatre. Three new bold and exciting new works will be coming to life at the Arts Centre this February to receive feedback from the many eager audience members who will purchase seats. Each of the three shows offers something unique to its audiences. *New Black*, written by Stephen Helper in collaboration with Leeroy Bliney, and supported by members of the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts, is about a young indigenous lawyer making his own way in the corporate world of law firm Kingsworth, Kerrigan & Klein. With an original score by Marcus Cowora, the music intrepidly moves from genres such as pop and soul to jazzy tones and country twang while moving the audience with the heartfelt performances and spirited writing. "The story is relevant to the here and now," says cast member Leeroy Bliney. "What moves me is having the opportunity to express it in this way, touching on subjects that are not easily spoken and/or understood in the wider community and including the fun and laughter with great music and story telling."

Dreamsong, written by Hugo Chiarella with composition by Robert Tripolino, takes a different path as a self-proclaimed ‘irreverent satire of faith, fortune and the mega-church.’ Set in America, Pastor Richard Sunday’s Evangelical Mega-Church has lost millions from the Global Financial Crisis, and so Richard decides to stage the second coming of Jesus and market him as a Centrefold Superstar. Written with Christian pop American power ballads and touch of Gospel, the musical touches on traditional conventions while adding its own personality to the mix. Cast member John O’May is impressed by the creative team. “For young people to create something from an idea and bring it to this stage is nothing short of miraculous and I’m proud to be part of being on the ground floor of a new work.”

The third show in this year's *Carnegie 18* series is *Cautionary Tales for Children*, a satirical cabaret that teaches lessons about good behaviour in way that truly gets through to kids. Using humour, music and in incredible imaginative palette, this show, based on poems by Hilaire Belloc and brought to life by Claudia O’Doherty, will attract children and family alike with it’s show-within-a-show setting and more than competent cast. Hilaire Belloc, a poet and writer of the 20th century, used his poems as cautionary tales to young children, combining humour and moralistic teachings. And the moral of the show itself? According to cast member Bert LaBonte, the moral is “That is pays to be good. But in reality we’d never know what that was without the bad.”

These three new works are ably supported by their incredible creative teams and talented casts, some of whom have workshoped new musicals before, such as Rosiemarie Harris in *Shane Warne: The Musical*, and Sam Ludeman in *Once We Lived Here*. These artists all have positive things to say about *Carnegie 18* and what it offers. “It’s exactly what Australia needs!” says Sam Ludeman, cast member of *Dreamsong*. “Brilliant Australian work now has a chance to be recognised because of this initiative. Being apart of *Once We Lived Here* (written by Matt Frank and Dean Bryant) and now *Dreamsong* makes me realise how many talented Aussies are out there and deserve to have their work seen.” “It brings new Australian works to one of the most respected arts venues in the country,” agrees Rosiemarie Harris, cast member of *Cautionary Tales for Children*. “Not only does it allow the writers to see their work come to life over a two week workshop period but it also gets their new works performed in the cultural heart of Melbourne. “Unfortunately,” she adds, “normally, due to lack of resources, primarily funding, new shows are often pushed to smaller lesser known venues, often missing the attention that they deserve and desperately need in order to have a future.” Attention is incredibly important in trying to get a show going, which is why opportunities like this come once in a lifetime. Marcus Cowora (Composer of *New Black*) grabbed the unexpected opportunity when it came along. “I was a



trainer at the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts when Stephen Helper was invited to work with students to devise a show to be performed at QPAC,” he says. “My primary role was to be a support to the students. I had shown Stephen one of my songs and he loved it. The song ‘Everybody’ was used in the show. Then soon after he asked me if I was interested in writing songs for a musical. I totally couldn't believe it and was blown away with the thought of me writing a musical with Stephen Helper. Long story short, I said yes and moved to Sydney. We have been meeting for the last year to work on the musical *The New Black*.”

Carnegie 18 is an initiative that any theatre admirers or theatre aspirers should be proud of. Our industry here is a small one, but if we can be boast anything it's that we have a strong community and a generous spirit, and the Arts Centre's series of new musicals will only strengthen this even more. So go and support our theatrical industry. At only \$10.00 a ticket, you get to see new, original stories told by experienced and talented professionals, and mostly, you get to be a part of the innovation of *Carnegie 18*.