

# Experimental theatre is alive and well ...

*Cascando*: La Mama

Enigmatic director Val Kirwan, alias Chiloan and Benny the Dip, uses words by Samuel Beckett from various plays and novels to create a collage of acutely theatrical images.

Some of them work splendidly: the anonymous rugged-up figures carrying umbrellas who can be seen through the glass-doors walking around outside during the performance create something reminiscent of a Magritte.

Other delights were the man in the white suit and panama hat wafting a painted Japanese fan who delivered the haunting monologue on the aerial sensations of being on crutches; the prolonged and studied toast burning, the man with the bandaged head and the awkward bike clattering all over the place creating havoc in all his actions — an apology for his existence but at the same time defying propriety ... and the superb cello player.

All the senses were attuned and teased during the performance — a rare thing indeed.

Val Kirwan's earlier piece *Hamjamb* and the *Gigolo* relied on self-contained setpieces was more successful overall. *Cascando* is more ambitious — it tries to create interaction between characters and some affectivity; sadly only some of this comes off.

The two women do not work, since neither their individuality, nor their



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relationship is particularly well-defined.

Promising more than it finally delivered, *Cascando* achieved a tantalising but transient effect. Some of the images were genuinely unsettling and provocative yet the whole performance lacked an integrated idea which could have made accessible the exciting, bizarre images it so expertly created.

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*Finger to the Trigger*; Theatre Projects. La Mama.

This production was devised and acted but a group of six women, and directed by James McCaughey.

It uses material written by the actors, poems by Emily Dickinson, excerpts from *King Lear*, *The Three Sisters* and bits from Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Garcia Lorca, Aboriginal songs and others.

*Finger to the ...* began inauspiciously with a contrived workshop opening, which was unfortunate because the rest was intense, exciting at times, and thoroughly engrossing.

The infamous who - loves - me - best? scene from *Lear* intercut with complimentary lines from

other writers opened out the text, illuminating both Shakespeare and the plight of women called to account for their feelings.

Susie Fraser's poem about waking up alone was so moving because of the physical reference provided by her body rolled up into a tight ball.

The mime with shoes abstractly characterised in a concise, witty way the completeness of the roles we play. Interspersed through the show was Barbie Ciszewska's mute housewife enacting her day — it sharply created the sense of a person who goes through the forms but rarely engages her own self.

The self-evaluation/flagellation session was inspired and telling (remarkably it has never been done before in women's theatre) but I would have liked it to have been developed further.

The psychology tutorial was, in the context of the evening, clichéd and out of place.

If the group has any affinities with the Women's Theatre Group, it is with *Women and Children First* (1975) but in general *Finger ...* eschews didactics, politics and confrontation in favor of a tentative exploration of the significantly personal.

Diversity of this sort is an important contribution to women's theatre. Given the vibrant creativity of the group, one hopes they will continue their explorations, but in more adventurous and riskier ways in the future.