

## **4 STAR REVIEW – WEEKEND NOTES**

**A dark tale of revenge in the #MeToo era**

Overall rating: ★★★★

Content warning: Coarse language, violence, sexual references, domestic/gendered violence, rape, sexual assault. 18

It is a heavy undertaking to dissect an ancient Roman poem 15-books-long in a 60-minute play. It also seems like a convoluted plot for only pompous intellectuals. However, *Cockroach* is a simple and engaging production disrupting tales from the epic poem 'The Metamorphoses' by Roman poet *Ovid*. No prior epic poetry knowledge required.

Written and directed by **Melita Rowston** and performed by **Leah Donovan**, 'Cockroach' is a narrative of abuse and revenge with a feminist perspective. In the era of the **#MeToo** movement, there is a clear demand for stories that undo the silencing of sexual assault victims. The play takes a dark comedic approach to the harsh realities experienced by many women.

The basic synopsis of the play follows a woman named C transform into a cockroach following long-term abuse from their partner. As a cockroach, she seeks out rapists in the act and carries out swift, cruel and unusual punishments. The content warning is not to take lightly. There are frequent graphic depictions of rape and violence in this play.

The nightmarish story plays on *Franz Kafka's* 1915 novella 'The Metamorphosis' where a man wakes up one day as a putrid bug. There are also modern intertextual references exposing the many poor representations of women in mainstream film. The play further criticises the mixed messages and expectations given to women in today's society.

The solo performer Donovan embodies different characters, including victims, assaulters-turned-victims and the star insect, from head to toe. Her physicality is impressive. She crouches to the ground and jumps onto chairs and gets close to the audience. The fast-paced movements and speech are easily understood. While the narrative themes may make you uncomfortable, Donovan will keep your eyes and ears trained on her.

There are so many simple elements like song, voiceover, prose poetry, lights and music used to stage this story of female anger. The accompanist **Benito Di Fonzo** enhances the play with an underscore using multiple instruments. Fonzo and Donovan never miss a beat.

If you have the stomach for it, the disturbing fantasy-meets-reality production 'Cockroach' will startle you out of your seat. It may not be pleasant viewing, but it will be entertaining.

**Cockroach will be performing at the Bakehouse Theatre March 6 - 10, as part of Adelaide Fringe. [Book through FringeTIX](#).**