

The Umbrella Plays



By Cerise De Gelder. Directed by Kelly Mildenhall. Adelaide Fringe / Wanderlust. The Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. February 16-27, 2016

The Umbrella Plays see a small ensemble of nine impressively versatile actors – Adam Tuomien, James Sherwin, Matt Houston, Rosie Williams, Timisha Ward, David Salter, Joshua Colwell, Maxim Bevan and Tamara Bennetts - play multiple characters in a series of ten loosely connected comedic skits, each of which is focused upon an absurd argument or social misunderstanding, with umbrellas featuring in all of them somehow.

Some of these scenarios are recognisably familiar situations given a

darkly comic twist, such as children arguing about the facts of life in the playground, a paroled convict seeking to resolve his pent-up insecurities with a prostitute and an old married couple bunglingly planning ahead for their eventual demise. Others are blatantly absurd situations made even funnier by the serious gravitas with which they are presented, such as a taxi driver stuck arguing the finer points of physics with two difficult passengers as his car dangles precariously on the edge of a precipice following a bridge collapse.

The dialogue is bitingly witty throughout and the chameleonic cast bring the same high energy level to each episode, ensuring that the pacing never drags and the laugh-level remains surprisingly consistent. Anthology shows like this can often come across as patchy, with certain parts sticking out as “filler” or “thriller”, but these 10 sketches all provoked much merriment from the audience on opening night. The clunky and unnecessary framing device chosen by director Kelly Mildenhall (a bunch of bored guests at a beach resort playing an elaborate charades-style party game to kill their boredom) is the only laboured aspect of the show; fortunately it doesn't take up too much time.

The Umbrella Plays is that rarest of Fringe Comedy beasts, a show that is both delightfully mischievous and keenly intelligent. Recommended.

Benjamin Orchard