

# [Title of Show] Stage Whispers Review



**Music & Lyrics by Jeff Bowen. Book by Hunter Bell. Adelaide Fringe. Directed by Hayley Horton. The Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. February 17-21, 2015**

By turns gut-bustingly hilarious, tear-jerkingly poignant and head-spinningly surreal, *[title of show]* is a profoundly insightful (and profoundly amusing) depiction of the various agonies and ecstasies inherent in the creative process.

Website designer/struggling composer, Jeff (Rod Schultz) and his unemployed writer buddy, Hunter (Scott Reynolds) are two nobodies from New York who dream of creating their own totally original Broadway musical and hitting the big time. In trying to come up with ideas they end up turning to their own lives for inspiration, crafting a show that is a series of comedic skits focused on the struggles of working artists to balance various

personal/professional commitments with their creative endeavours, establish a productive work ethic with collaborators and conquer the twin demons of self-doubt and procrastination. In collaborating with pianist, Larry (Peter Johns) and actresses, Heidi & Susan (Claire McEvoy & Amy Nagesh) they find further material they can incorporate into their chronicle of "The Artist's Journey".

The dialogue has a consistently snappy wit to it, and the characterisation of showbiz personalities will no doubt come across as painfully authentic to anyone who has been involved with theatre behind the scenes. There are perhaps one too many pop-culture references sprinkled throughout, often to obscure shows that only hardcore Broadway enthusiasts will remember, though the underlying meaning of these references is usually decipherable from the overall context of the conversation. Proceedings are enlivened significantly by some exuberantly irreverent and wildly unpredictable breaking of the fourth wall, and even the briefest tunes featured are quite earwormy.



The various skits that comprise the show take place on a bare stage with four chairs being the only sets, and the only musical accompaniment to the singing provided by Johns seated at the piano. But this stripped-down, "bare minimum" approach to staging works in making the audience get a feel for the humble beginnings of the protagonists. Jason Groves' inventive lighting design does a marvellous job of delineating the transition from one scene to the next, as does director Hayley Horton's incorporation of vividly evocative mime into the actors' physical movement. Johns' fingerwork is so

impressively nimble you won't miss the presence of a bigger band.

The original production (which gained a cult following via YouTube and iTunes) featured composer Jeff Bowen, writer Hunter Bell, musical director Larry Pressgrove and actresses Susan Blackwell and Heidi Blickenstaff playing autobiographical roles. Given just how closely associated they are with the characters, the cast of this production faced an even greater challenge in making the roles their own than they would in a revival of a conventional musical.

But Reynolds, Schultz, McEvoy and Nagesh do a wonderful job of embodying the emotional journey of their characters, and wisely don't try to slavishly imitate the mannerisms of the original cast. The technical quality of their singing and dancing is first rate and they have a solid chemistry together. Johns' character is a man of few words who mostly just sits silently behind the piano, but when he does open his mouth to speak, the words count.

The laughter from the audience on opening night was frequent and very loud. Given this enthusiastic response, it is very hard to conclude that "[title of show]" is anything but a must see event at this year's Adelaide Fringe Festival, especially for those who consider themselves to be struggling artists.

*Benjamin Orchard*

Photographer: Daniel Salmond