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The Ajoona Guest House

Bakehouse Theatre

Until December 11

Over 20 or more years, Adelaide-born, award-winning playwright Stephen House has forged a career that now sees him widely performed in Australia and overseas. His monologues, in particular, have won wide acclaim.

House offers a unique journey into worlds and ways that are not often written about, and much of this is informed by his life as a "queer-nomad", moving from place to place interstate and overseas, often unfamiliar, away from lovers and family and friends. This has sharpened the way he looks at others and observes their lives.



Playwright and performer Stephen House in The Ajoona Guest House. Picture: Supplied

The Ajoona Guest House, the fruit of an Asialink India literature residency, adds to previous pieces that reflected on time spent in Paris and Dublin. Set in the grimy back-blocks of Delhi, the Ajoona is the home-away-from-home for a colourful array of misfits.

It's often been said that House's characters are always looking for something better in their lives. Their glass is always half-full. So it is with the Ajoona, even though the travelling companions are all-too-often poverty, addiction and misery. If aspirations haven't failed, they've been sorely tested. The recurring mantra 'Om Shri Ganeshaya Namah' seems to often fall on deaf ears.

House weaves in and out of his character's lives with consummate skill. And the writing is really fine. Lines like the "steady stream of a messy memory" and "dangerously brittle wandering emotions" reflect his growing stature as a poet.

House has always been generous in sharing his work with others, and engaging Rosalba Clemente as director ensures that dramatically, and dramaturgically, the hour-long piece utterly engages.

It might be a dump, but The Ajoona Guest House gets five stars.

- PETER BURDON