

The Ajoona Guest House



By Stephen House. Bakehouse Studio, Adelaide. 1-11 December 2021

The Ajoona Guest House is the third in a trilogy of monologues, each set in a different city, by award-winning storyteller, Adelaide born Stephen House. The writer, poet, artist and self-described “queer nomad” draws on his lifetime of travels to expose gritty stories of the downtrodden and damaged. House has said himself that he brings attention to the “plight of the underclass”. As writer and solo performer he does so with a skill, both in

language and performance, that is emotional, embracing and exquisite.

On a bare black stage, almost completely devoid of set and props, we join House in New Delhi, at a guest house that he has frequented over the years, *The Ajoona Guest House*. Through periods spent in India as a young, wide-eyed extra on Bollywood films, through heart-breaking young love, addiction, temptation, and spirituality, House plunges us into a world that is as beautiful as it is dangerous.



House interweaves rough yet colourful threads that create a bright and closely woven cloth from the stories of the damaged. He imparts difficult stories with ease, with playfulness and with anguish. He masterfully drops us into New Delhi, into the heat and bustle of the city, onto the street-corner, into the nightclub, the café, the addict’s tunnel. House deftly segues from character to character with a manner that is both believable and impressive.

The writing is both astute and poetic, a form that House has embraced. The words are powerful, subtle, emotional, yet sometimes gritty and harsh. They flow, they are carefully chosen and they are masterfully delivered. The stories of *The Ajoona Guest House* are not intended to sit comfortably with an audience who are used to living a comfortable life. However, House gives his audience a comfortable and intimate experience, almost akin to a bed-time story being read by a loved one, albeit a sometimes grim one.

Much loved South Australian director Rosalba Clemente gives us an eloquent and thought-provoking hour with House, using the small space and House’s physicality to full advantage. Stephen Dean’s lighting design takes us seamlessly from the stoop at the front of the Guest House to the dark recesses of the drug peddlers’ back alley. And all of this is backed up with a beautiful soundscape by Alain Valodze, one that supports the audience’s transportation to, and immersion into, the streets of New Delhi.

The Ajoona Guest House is a compelling hour in the theatre. It’s not a long season so get a ticket, if you can, to see this master storyteller in his element.

Jenny Fewster