

Stephen House faces up to society's most vulnerable side

In *Almost Face to Face*, Adelaide playwright Stephen House finds himself in Dublin sharing, or rather squatting in, a pokey upstairs room with the exquisitely described Miss Big.

Peter Burdon, *The Advertiser*



Adelaide playwright Stephen House's gritty, honest theatre has long been recognised for its penetrating insight into society, especially those who are vulnerable, whether for their practical or emotional weakness or poverty, their misadventure, or simply for being different.



House is, by his own admission, a cultural chameleon, driven by instinct to adapt to and absorb his surroundings.

In *Almost Face to Face*, he finds himself in Dublin sharing, or rather squatting in, a pokey upstairs room with Miss Big, obese, housebound, turning tricks for cash, whose apparent joy in life – always a smile and a cuddle – is wildly at odds with the wretchedness of her situation.

Whether she wants or needs anything more is a moot point, but he is driven by those same uncontrollable urges to run an errand, make way for a caller by scooting out onto the fire escape – the view of the river Iffley is beautiful, even wrapped in a blanket in the chill night air – and even share his body, if never quite his soul.

Miss Big is one of a number of characters we meet, all exquisitely described in this 60-minute monologue, tightly directed by Peter Green.

House's stage persona is magnetic, mainly softly spoken, and with an attractive lilt, but there are some shattering outbursts which remind us that much of the world lives closer to the edge than the privileged could ever imagine.

Almost Face to Face is both a response to the affective and aesthetic pivots that inspire House's work – and they are many and complex – and a mature, sophisticated essay in theatrical technique. It's a fine piece.

Almost Face to Face

Bakehouse Theatre

December 5-14