

# Reasons to be Pretty at The Bakehouse Theatre

*Reasons to be Pretty* Reviewed by: Peter Bleby for Aussie Theatre on 13/06/2015



*Nic Krieg in Reasons to be Pretty. Photo by Michael Errey*

When you add self centred-ness, concrete thinking, closed-mindedness and power struggles to a serious dose of intellectual and emotional immaturity and superficiality, the results in terms of calm and rewarding relationships are sure to be less than pretty. Such is the case in, and the focus of this somewhat strangely named play.

Steph (Clare Mansfield) has heard from her friend Carly (Krystal Brock) that her boyfriend Greg (Nic Krieg) has said something about her face that she sees as derogatory. In a fine opening scene played with enormous energy and slick, competent repartee, the two are locked in intense conflict as she refuses to hear or accept any denial or explanation from him. This opening fracas sets the scene for a series of conflicts between the various couple combinations possible in this foursome, frequently characterised by lots of “he said, she said” assumptions and misinterpretations, as their various relationships get demolished in a sea of self-centred and unforgiving misunderstandings and inadequate communication.

Greg is the only one who emerges triumphant, having distanced himself from the various fights – even physically with his former best mate, Kent (David Hirst), showing that honesty, reliability, straight-forwardness and self acceptance win the day. Not only is this the victorious role, but it is played very nicely by Krieg with a winning down-to-earth laconic and appealing style.

Hirst is convincing as Kent – a self-righteous, chauvinistic bully. He tosses off extraordinary insults, and atrociously derogatory attitudes about his wife, Carly, and women in general, and pulls big bully boy power tactics on Greg, who finally backs him into a corner from which he is reduced to a tirade of invective from an extremely limited vocabulary mostly consisting of the much-repeated F word. This actor has a remarkably mobile face which he uses to great advantage.

Krystal Brock, as Carly, plays a smooth transition from a somewhat bland gossip to a worried expectant mum with well-founded suspicions about husband Kent’s fidelity. Clare Mansfield’s Steph is convincingly played as an unappealing and superficial (albeit pretty) harridan. Even when she is trying to be soft and conciliatory the volatile anger is just below the surface.

In spite of its verbal (and occasional physical) violence and high tension, there are some appealingly funny lines and moments. The play over-exposes the F word and frankly sexual expressions, and could bear about 20 minutes cut out of it. Furthermore, one can’t help feeling that it exaggerated the level of conflict that may realistically exist in a series of relationships such as are portrayed.

**So if you can’t take too much swearing and verbal aggression, stay away. On the other hand if you want to see some fine and vigorous acting, don’t miss it.**