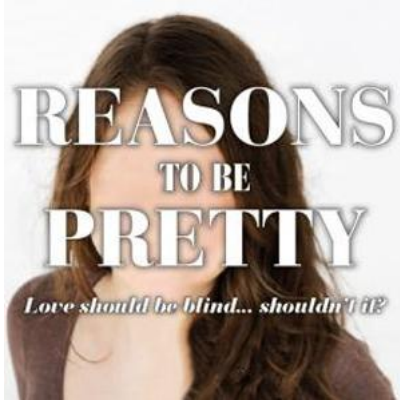


Reasons To Be Pretty

Barefoot review



Bakehouse Theatre Company. Bakehouse Theatre. 13 Jun 2015

Misogyny, insecurity, spite, venom, and jealousy; they're hoary old dramatic themes but not usually intensively concentrated unless it be in a Neil Labute drama. This little ripper of an emotional pressure cooker is not a kitchen sink drama. It is a factory lunch room number. And, it is not exactly a working class saga but a class clash epic.

As we meet Greg and Steph, they are in violent, virulent conflict. She is on the attack. He has spoken poorly of her to his best mate whose thick and stupid girlfriend has seen fit to pass on the hurtful words. Steph won't take them lying down. She has an extended hissy-fit in which she generally explains how bad it is to make thoughtless comments on the physical appearance of others. Greg has referred to her looks as "regular".

The tirade goes back and forth and forth and back. Torrents of words are screamed. Greg was obviously wrong, but Steph is a foul-mouthed neurotic harridan who really wants an argument. Greg wants it all to go away. Fool that he is, he loves this strident hairdresser. But Greg, we finally realise, is adrift way outside his intellectual and cultural world. He has fallen into a hades of the dim and dangerous people. His best friend, Kent, is a grotesque caricature of a vulgar, ignorant sexist pig. One can't imagine how Greg has ever tolerated him. But Kent has a respectable girlfriend called Carly, a security guard, who seems not to notice how gutter-repugnant he is.

So there we have it; four catastrophic characters screaming at each other about who has betrayed whom and how. Somehow in the middle of all this, Greg wanders from scene to scene with a veritable library of classic literature in his hand.

His dolt friends regularly ask him what he is reading and he tells them. Their idea of a book is TV Week. What are these people doing together?

In the end of the day, Greg has his moment, a pyrrhic victory. We believe there are better things ahead for him.

The others are losers and we never want to see them again. What a pity there are so many such people crowding out this world, we feel as we totter, exhausted, from the theatre.

We have not liked what we saw. But we were not bored. Reason for this is not just Joh Hartog's fiercely snappy direction of the ferocious cut and thrust of it all, but the performances of the four actors. They are intense, committed and utterly focused, drawing the audience tightly into the awful thrall of the work. If Krystal Brock is convincing as Carly, Clare Mansfield is searing as awful Steph.

David Hirst is so absolutely obnoxious as Kent that one may find oneself crossing the street to get away from the poor man if one ever sees him in real life.

Nic Krieg holds the key to the play as hapless Greg, the only character for whom the audience can feel an ounce of sympathy. He is a battered soul, out of his depth among the philistines. Krieg's embodiment of all of this simply breaks one's heart. Never did an actor colour a character with more shades of hurt. It's a tour de force. This brutish Labute play merits seeing for the Krieg of it.

Samela Harris

When: 13 to 27 Jun

Where: Bakehouse Theatre Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com