

## The Good Son

Review by Samela Harris – Barefoot Review



The Other Ones. Bakehouse Theatre. 10 April 2015

The buzz of anticipation in the Bakehouse foyer held a special current of thrill on the opening night of *The Good Son*.

This was no ordinary play. It was a long-awaited new play by a rising Adelaide playwright who is also a popular and respected professional actress. Her steady determination to enter that hardest-of-all writing genres has rallied support from some of the country's top talent - and funding through Pozible. So, there were many threads of interest gathered there in that cosy foyer with, it felt, not just hope that the finished work would be good but trust that it would.

The trust was well-placed, as it turned out. What Elena Carapetis has written is latter-day kitchen sink realism which seems to nod in the direction of the great Eugene O'Neill whose renown *Long Day's Journey Into Night* has just finished playing under the banner of Independent Theatre. While *The Good Son* is but 80 minutes long and is about a Greek-Australian family, its likeness to *Long Day's Journey* is that it is an extremely intense and emotional journey in a day in the life of a dysfunctional family. Perhaps one may find thematic nods to Osborne and others. But the play stands on its own merit. It is a topical tragedy. It is powerful, pertinent and Australian.

Its characters are well-wrought and Carapetis shows her nous in the carefully-measured way in which they develop - building skilfully towards the play's passionate and poignant denouement.

The central character is Meda, the Greek matriarch whose pokies problem has been a long and divisive family issue. Despite this, she has retained manipulative power over the son who has stayed at home to support her. She's a devious old vixen and yet generous and loving in her suffocating way. As embodied by Eugenia Fragos, she is a veritable kaleidoscope of moods, snapping in a trice from charming to vulnerable to vengeful. Fragos's performance is nothing less than riveting.

Renato Musolino plays Frank, the hapless son who craves nothing more than a life of his own. Expecting his mother to be out, he has smuggled a new girlfriend into the house overnight and is trying to give her coffee in bed when Mum appears. This scenario provides a deliciously amusing opening to the play while also laying ground for ensuing tensions. The play is not without wit and irony as well as fire and ire.

Musolino plays comedically passionate and furtive and then displays a wealth of hurts and perplexities as the truths and deceits of Frank's situation evolve. Musolino is an accomplished actor and he was right at home in a nice, juicy role. Less seen on the Adelaide stage is Dimitrios Sirilas who appears as Jimmy, the close family friend who is almost a second son to Meda. Sirilas, with his little bob of pony tail, plays the wide boy with disconcerting ease. Meanwhile, there is Ana, the could-be/would-be girlfriend, played by Adriana Bonacurso. At first, she seems to be the play's minor character but all is not quite what it seems. Bonacurso gives a mighty performance.

One of the reasons the play sits well is that these four characters are not only believable but they also are, in their way, likeable. They feel real.

This is a very well-prepared production under the perceptive direction of Corey McMahon. He is supported by the knowing hand of producer Joanna Hartstone with an all-star backstage line-up of composer Jason Sweeney and lighting designer Ben Flett with creative associates Olivia Zanchetta and Alexander Ramsay. Most significantly, also, is Manda Webber with a domestic set the likes of which never has been seen in *The Bakehouse*. Made entirely of recycled materials, it even has its own walk-in kitchen as well as the true look of Greek-Australian domesticity: the patterned wallpaper; the lace curtains; the plastic tablecloth cover; and the lovingly-tended floral sofa.

And thus, with talent and diligence, with industry support and enthusiasm, does Elena Carapetis arrive fully-fledged as a new Australian playwright. And one may look forward to her future output.

Samela Harris

When: 10 to 25 Apr

When: Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: [bakehousetheatre.com](http://bakehousetheatre.com)