

Review by Mark Svendsen

15th March, 2024

GRIT Perseverance Street Theatre Company

WRCC Auditorium 13 March 2024

Good theatre is an unmitigated pleasure and GRIT is very good theatre – with music – for added delight.

A small but appreciative audience of 70 or so were treated to an intelligent script, superb ensemble acting and singing and great technical production at the Walter Reid Cultural Centre Auditorium on Wednesday night. It's always difficult getting an audience out mid-week in Rockvegas but this time, unless they were having good sex, the non-attending audience chose the wrong option.

This ensemble piece was built from stories collected from 30 residents of Gympie and environs after the devastating 2022 flood in that city. Split into six 'chapters' the ensemble refined the central themes of these tales and their characters down into symbolic stories and tropes of the grit and resilience of the community of Gympie. This type of theatre has a place in every community and companies like Perseverance Street need to be at the forefront of facilitating the process of playmaking from collected stories for each of these communities.

Lead actor Fletcher Colfs who, as the storyteller of all six chapters, was never out of the spotlight, presented an acting tour-de-force. This twenty-year-old made the roles of both male and female characters of varying ages and backgrounds his own with deftly placed nuance and either gravitas or comic force as need dictated.

Other cast members (listed in the programme as Chorus members), Sarah Harvey, Ben Adams and Abby Bowyer made as much as they could with the limited spotlight moments they had, making up for this undersupply with excellent singing and stage craft. Often unsighted from each other they maintained close harmonies, clarion-call diction and tight ensemble singing through poignant numbers and rock n roll beltors alike with nary a quavering note. Further they all know how to hang out and take in the washing beautifully and, in one superbly coordinated moment of moving physical theatre proved that, as for folding sheets, they can nail those babies.

The script by Writer/Director, Sharon Hogan, and Company playwright-in-residence, Sofia Abbey vividly captured the authentic new character voices telling the story in each different chapter. There were some moments of script frailty when the narratives became more abstract, or focussed on small town tropes – "I hate this place. Can't wait to get out." In these moments the character driven tempo waned slightly – but not enough to derail the emotional thrust of the scenes. Experiments with multiple voices also worked very well.

Fantastic also to have music by Alex Harvey composed and recorded especially for the show. The score complements the action brilliantly in tandem with seamlessly produced lighting and soundscape (deftly handled by designer, technician, tour manager and all-round powerhouse Jonas White in the box), moving the narrative forward and highlighting thematic and emotional flash points.

GRIT was brought to Rockhampton in a collaborative effort between the show's progenitors, Perseverance Street Theatre Company out of Gympie; hosted by Midpoint Theatre Company, based in Yeppoon; and supported by JUTE Theatre Company in Cairns. GRIT proves the point that the best of regional theatre more than makes the grade and deserves touring to audiences throughout the State. Keep an eye open for return visits from this talented troupe.