

her pornographic task. It is the mimicry of the puppet that complicates all the issues: who is manipulating whom in this sexual display?

Caravan is a work that demonstrates the possibilities of puppetry, no longer the preserve of children but a disturbing demonstration of theatrical power.

Adults-only puppet magic pushes the boundaries

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THEATRE REVIEW: CARAVAN, By Nancy Black and Paul Newcombe, directed by Nancy Black. Dante's (upstairs), 154 Gertrude St, Fitzroy until June 29

A puppet show, strictly for adults, featuring pornographic dancing, violence, murder and mutilation: sounds weird, and Caravan certainly pushes a few boundaries. The puppets are tiny; their puppeteers dwarf them and become part of the action themselves. The plot, characters and action are pure pulp fiction, familiar stereotypes are given a strange significance in this guise.

Some of Australia's leading puppeteers are at work here, such as Rod Primrose, a founding member of Handspan, and Vanessa Ellis, Rinske Ginsberg and Paul Newcombe. Director Nancy Black, David Corbet (Sound Designer), Ben Grant (original music) and Tom Howie, (Lighting Designer), have created a work all the more powerful for its miniaturisation. The soundtrack is a blurred and muffled montage of music and sounds or snatches of trite romantic pop songs. Together they contribute a suggestive background that throws the extreme action into threatening relief.

Black and her theatre workers have deconstructed the charm of the puppet to unsettle our responses, both to the little people and animals they depict and to the bloody story that unfolds.

Moths fluttering around a light pole or a dog enthusiastically peeing on people's belongings remind us of the child-like pleasure at the ingenuity of puppetry. But the brutal chopping off of an arm or a head, revive memories of the violence of the original Punch and Judy.

Sexual politics are also at play. Cherry, a stripper and prostitute, plays the part of victim, the classic whore who is bashed by her keeper. But she turns the tables with murderous success: this Judy avenges Punch's violence with a knife and a meat cleaver. Rod Primrose is her puppeteer, and his skill can be seen in every tiny gesture that builds a sense of character for the puppet. When Cherry finally emerges to dance, she is suddenly enormous, in relation to her usual size, and her performance raises the question of the attitude of the dancer to