

Local Theatre

I'm Wanita

In the country music capital of **Australia**, **Tamworth**, in the shadow of the giant 12 metre **Golden Guitar**, **Australia's** ageing "Queen of Honky Tonk," **Wanita Bahtiyar**, is desperately scrounging enough cash to finance her long-held dream of becoming **Australia's** **Loretta Lynn**.

"**Loretta Lynn** was the greatest interpreter of the common man, the common person, the common woman, the common transsexual, whoever," **Wanita** declares.

Director **Matthew Walker's** fractured fairy tale, **I'm Wanita**, is utterly compelling.

A whats-and-all documentary, **Wanita's** quixotic obsession with making it in country music has guided her choices since the age of seven and left her loved ones in her wake.

Her daughter no longer talks to her, and her **Turkish** husband, **Baba**, is bewildered by her fixation.

A true eccentric, unquestionably delusional, wonderfully talented, **Wanita** is beset by demons.

Fuelled by alcohol, financed by sex work, **Wanita** and her two **Sancho Panza's**, **Gleny Rae** and **Archer**, head off to the bright lights of **Memphis, New Orleans** and **Nashville** for one last shot at hitting the big time.

Gleny seems on the verge of a nervous breakdown wrangling the unmanageable **Wanita**.

"I struggle with the lack of structure," she says without irony.

"I reckon you'd be better off if you didn't drink," **Archer** tells **Wanita** in perhaps the understatement of the film.

In **Nashville**, to record **Wanita's** album with the legendary **Billy Yates**, producer of artists such as **Charley Pride** and **Willie Nelson**, we wait with bated breath for the inevitable train wreck to come.

To everyone's surprise, **Wanita** delivers each soaring country ballad with one take.

"There are acts, and there are artists. You are a true artist," **Yates** tells **Wanita**.

Maybe this time.

In **Melbourne** cinemas, January 6.

- Review by Kathryn Keeble

WellBless

WellBless is a play perfectly suited to provide satirical commentary on the strange, dark times we live in.

Think **Pete Evans** spruiking beating **COVID** with his \$15,000 light machine or **Antivaxxers** warning us to watch out for injectable 5G; misinformation, spin and scams are everywhere.

"Cancer is just the body's way of telling you that you should have taken more care of yourself." So says wellness guru **Juniper** played by **Ella Roth Barton**.

Pseudoscience and snake oil wrapped up as empowerment where love, crystals and clean living will cure cancer.

"Wasting good wellness is self-sabotage," **Juniper** pontificates.

Inconveniently, her star recruit, **Maha (Emily Joy)**, who swapped her chemo for **Juniper's WellBless Miracle Tonic**, drops dead during the **WellBless Soul Convergence**.

An entertaining play that occasionally takes itself too seriously, it's at its best when it pokes fun at the ridiculous.

Some very funny writing by co-creators **Barton** and **Debra Thomas** translate into many excellent comedic moments.

Joseph Lai and **Lauren Steiner** play out some particularly funny scenes.

There is a message in the madness that doesn't need overworking into melodrama.

Wellness is a multi-million-dollar making industry.

Selling Wellness is another avenue for unscrupulous fraudsters to shame and guilt-trip women into buying unproven treatments at exorbitant prices with the promise of a miracle cure.

Unfortunately, the pace is slowed by some unnecessary scene changes where one item of furniture moves on and offstage – easily fixed switching from stage to floor to stage without the need for blackouts or moving the table. A bonus, as this would have shortened the running time.

WellBless was presented at **Theatre Works, S Kilda**.

- Review by Kathryn Keeble

Melbourne

Confidential

Talk is cheap, gossip is priceless

Around the World in 80 Days

Playhouse Players Inc. present **Around the World in 80 Days** from February 2 - 5 at 7.30pm at the **Clayton Theatre**, Cooke St, Clayton.

This timeless classic written by **Jules Verne** is adapted for stage by **Mark Brown** and directed by **Graeme McCoubrie**.

The story follows two travellers who grow to a trio then a foursome as they fight their way through many obstacles to reach home.

The main characters include **Phileas Fogg** who is trying to win a bet with the **Reform Club** that he can travel around the world in 80 days.

Together with his new valet **Passepartout** he leaves **London** on October 2 1872, vowing to return by December 21, 1872.

Along the way they encounter **Detective Fix** and an **Indian Princess Aouda** who they rescue from certain death.

Will Fogg make it in time? A rail bridge collapses, Indians attack, a typhoon hits his sea voyage and let's not forget **Kiouni** the elephant.

Performance Season: February 2 - 5 at 7.30pm

Venue: Clayton Theatre, Cooke St., Clayton



● **Damian Vuleta, Stephen Keen, Mike Dixon and Karsh Chaudhary** rehearse **Phileas Fogg travels to India on Kiouni the Elephant to rescue the Indian Princess**.

Tickets: \$25/\$29

Bookings: www.trybooking.com/BQIMV

Enquiries: 0407 276973

Local Theatre

The Candidate

The performing industry has been decimated by the **COVID** pandemic and getting back to the theatre has been a struggle.

The **Melbourne French Theatre** has attempted to put on their current show **The Candidate** many times. The resilience of the Executive Director and Producer, **Michael Bula**, and his troupe of actors and crew is a testament to their love of all things theatrical.

After having their venue cancelled and finally securing the **Meat Market** in **North Melbourne**, the production was troubled by cast illness and pandemic isolation requirements. As a result some of the actors were still on the books but all battled on regardless.

The Candidate is a well written comedy (by **Jean Franco** and **Guillame Melanie**) which calls for quick repartee but this timing was a bit lost due to the last-minute cast changes.

Dominique Croset played a flamboyant but easy-going **Cecile Bouquigny**. She was confident yet relaxed in her role and showed an enjoyment for performing.

Olivia Bula played the seductive, sassy **Samantha Kolaski**. **Olivia** showed great expression and performed with panache. **Louis Tesson** was performed by **Richard Ryan**. He was the bright comic relief but sometimes overplayed his role a little.

His wife, **Sara Bellecour-Tesson** was played creatively by **Maria Paula Hernandez**. The other stand-in actors are to be congratulated for good characterisation.

The surtitles had obvious problems but will work well with more practice. Costumes by **Ayala Gopnik-McManus** were very well done.

The set was extremely tight but the effects worked. Although, maybe a smaller sun umbrella in front of the surtitles or none at all, would make one of the set changes more seamless.

This production has great potential so I urge all concerned to keep up the good work done so far and continue refining.

Melbourne French Theatre productions can be found at melbournefrenchtheatre.org.au

- Review by Lyn Jurst

My Brilliant Career

Sunday at a performance of **My Brilliant Career** from **Skin of our Teeth Productions**, written, produced and directed by **Christine Davey**; a large cast of nine who (apart from **Miles Franklin** and **Sybylla Melvyn**, **Franklin's** alter ego) share 14 plus characters.

It's a dramatisation of **Miles Franklin's** first and arguably best book and **Ms Davey** has mined it deeply.

It's a mistake for writer or director to lack trust in their audience's intelligent apprehension

of what they're watching, but in my opinion **Ms Davey** has done just that.

The two hour work had more signposts than the **Hume Highway**, many of them repeated too frequently or emphasised by the cast, like a **Greek** chorus, reduced to one word.

If that wasn't a deterrent to my enjoyment and appreciation of **Miles Franklin's** story, clearly autobiographical, one of the characters was an aged **Miles** who controlled and directed the production's progress and all this shouted.

I found interesting the characterisation of the males. It was as if the writer had altered **Orwell's** famous quote from **Animal Farm** "four legs good two legs bad" to "skirts good trousers bad"

Henry Lawson, who helped **Miles** have her work published, was presented to us one dimensionally as a drunk with a large brown jug (used thereafter by **Sybylla's** drunken failure of a father, another signpost).

We meet briefly a very jolly and informal **Banjo Paterson**, though why I couldn't fathom.

After interval, and blessed silence, the performance shifted from loud overacting to elements of coarse acting. The writer and director's characterisation of a family **Sybylla** becomes governess to was so snobbish and absurd as to insult intelligence.

Scant memorial for an adventurous and very useful human being who often put others first and whose bequest funded **The Miles Franklin Award** for work which presents "Australian life in any of its phases".

My Brilliant Career was presented at **La Mama Courthouse**.

- Review by Peter Green

Alter Edith at fortyfivedownstairs

To **fortyfive downstairs** for Thursday night last and the opening of **Alter Edith** from director **Maude Davey** and creator/performer (if they're the right words) **Holly Durant**. This was a very different performance than I been used to at **fortyfive downstairs**: "... almost performances amongst extraterrestrial environments" ... was the website's description.

I've been lucky to know **Maude** as a performer of her own work and also as a mainstay of **The Burlesque Hour**, an annual sell-out event at **fortyfive downstairs** and **Al La Mama**, for a long time.

The same for **Holly** in **The Burlesque Hour** curated by **Finucane** and **Smith**; burlesque that moved and shook but punched you when you weren't expecting with a new vision of relationship truths, feminism when you thought the costume wrong and the politics of getting respect and living authentic lives.

The **fortyfive downstairs** website announced **Alter Edith** as "an altar of alienation;

What's On

Death and The Discotheque

After a forced pandemic-pause, dance theatre work **Death and The Discotheque** is set to premiere at **The Butterfly Club** from January 5-8.

Set to an electro soundtrack, an unrelenting bass line and live narration; **Death and The Discotheque** is a rave parading as performance in memoriam to those we have lost and the experiences we crave. Both absent - one forever, one not.

Whilst the work is a deeply personal reflection by writer **Jessi Lewis**, the many and varied losses that have been experienced universally throughout these times may resonate with audiences. Common ground is found as grief and emotion are collectively unpacked - on the dancefloor.

"I wrote this show upon reflection of my 20s, which was a period of my life marked by the death. I lost so many friends that I almost lost count. The dance floor became my refuge, a safe space for me, a place to escape all the sadness."

Choreographed by **Sasha Chan** and **Jessi Lewis**; **Death and The Discotheque** dancers **Indya Brott**, **Sofia Reinking**, **Angus Eastwood**, **Ben White** and **Erin O'Rouke** emulate the energy of a crowded dance floor. With moves born on club floors and from within queer culture; whacking, voguing and ballroom styles fill the floor.

The soundtrack by **Robert Downie** (winner - best soundtrack **Melbourne Fringe** 2018) features percussionist **Ollie Cox**, and transports the audience to a sweaty, packed dance floor at a time just before the sun rises - then to a desert.

As writer and narrator, **Jessi Lewis** (a current **Globe Community Award** finalist - Outstanding **LGBTIQ** Media Reporting) has worked with long term collaborator and mentor **Tony Yap** to further refine the script and performative focus of the work. They have previously performed together in **Melbourne, India, Malaysia** and **Indonesia**.

Extending the performance beyond the realms of the theatre will be seven large scale photographic art works from the **Death And The Discotheque** photo series. The work of original artist and photographer, **Gregory Lorenzutti**, they will be featured in inner city locations in the lead up to the production.

"A team of around 20 creatives have been employed and engaged with on this project. I feel like together we have almost achieved the impossible in mounting this project. It certainly has been a long time coming and I'm beyond excited to finally bring this to the stage," said **Lewis**.

Performance Details: January 5 - 8 at 8.30pm

Venue: The Butterfly Club, 5 Carson Place, Melbourne

Tickets: \$26-\$35

Duration: 50 minutes

Bookings: thebutterflyclub.com

- Cheryl Threadgold

a good description of what I experienced.

The space stripped of its seating banks and a ramp reminiscent of skateboard purpose-built facilities. Lit at sudden and unexpected intervals blindingly together with a soundscape whose crescendos made earplugs a must; no time for reflection; **Alter Edith** was an experience impossible to ignore.

Holly; naked; moved much as I'm sure **Mary Shelly** imagined **Frankenstein's** creation discovered its limbs and their potential.

Thursday night **fortyfive downstairs** became "n altar of alienation" and **Holly** its sacrifice.

Holly's experiments with her body moved her into increasing sophistication, mixing a martini, discovering and wearing clothes but thus her loss of innocence. This 2021 **Eve** leaves the stage, strips naked ready to start again.

My advice? Get there.

- Peter Green