

What is the Matter with Mary Jane? | Slut



What's the Matter with Mary Jane? is actor and creative Sancia Robinson's autobiographical story of her long struggle with anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Co-written with Wendy Harmer, the play charts Sancia's harrowing downward spiral into mental illness that nearly took her life.

One of the many qualities of the writing is that Sancia's journey is not a bleak, solemn piece. There are bursts of activity, even moments of levity (these inexorably fall away), fantasy, and – in a horrific-yet-brilliant twisting of the television cooking show – parody as well.

On the page, it's a one-woman monologue, but Director Natasha Boyd breaks up the text among four actors: Casey Bohan, Samuel Howard, Jen Bush and Isabella Perversi. There are themes and aspects of the script heightened by this choice, with multiple internal voices and characters being shared, allowing the story to be told as clear as possible.

Some stories leave you feeling battered by their hopelessness, but thankfully that's not the note *Mary Jane* ends on. Her bleak trajectory seems impossible to pull out of until she hears herself utter the word, *Help*.

From here the show pivots and the dark stylistic beats gently fall away as all the compelling writing, performance, and direction come together in reassurance that there is a way through for those battling this abhorrent disease.

After interval, the wooden set is replaced by a large, spray-painted backdrop that stands throughout the performance of *Slut*. Written by Patricia Cornelius in the aftermath of a shooting in Melbourne's CBD and how the media treated one of the victims because she happened to be a stripper, *Slut* explores how slut-shaming affects all women across most of their lives.

Another choral piece for the most part, the play centres around the character of Lolita, played wonderfully by Reschelle O'Connor. Around her, Julia Lambert, Malaynee Hayden, Jen Bush and Casey Bohan are her peers and

friends.

They drive the bulk of the storytelling, detailing their years growing up from small girls to older and the insidious way they begin to be noticed by older men and sexualised. Before it's terrible climax, the most insidious moment in *Slut* comes when this sexualisation and shaming turns from being pressed upon the girls from outside forces and instead begins to come from the girls themselves.

An earlier rendition of *Slut* (also directed by Natasha Boyd, with all but one of the same cast) toured a few short play festivals around Victoria in 2018. Here, freed from the constraints of space and running time that are a condition of those events, this version of *Slut* is more grounded, engaging, and entertaining.

There's a risk in putting two choral pieces back-to-back that their pace or presentation feel too similar, however, Boyd does excellent work with her respective casts in giving the audience two very different pieces that both speak to issues that remain a blight on the lives of young women today.

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St. Martins Theatre, 44 St. Martins Lane, South Yarra

Performance: Thursday 6 May 2021

Season continues to 15 May 2021

Information and Bookings: www.fourthwalltheatrecompany.com.au

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Review: David Collins

2
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