



Adelaide Theatre Guide

www.theatreguide.com.au

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

NEXT TO NORMAL

The Factory and Six Foot Something

The Opera Studio
Until 26 May 2012

Review by Aaron MacDonald

It's difficult to portray mental illness without coming across as either hammy or incredibly offensive (or both). "Next to Normal" hits the right notes with sensitive but intense characters, while mercilessly mocking our psychopharmacological culture and the fact that, for the most part, treating psychosis is essentially still a crapshoot. The sensitive handling may have something to do with the fact that the production team has retained an actual clinical psychologist as a consultant.

Director David Lampard and MD Peter Johns (with voice consultant Helen Tiller) have pulled together a brilliant production which produces instant standing ovations. It's become a hallmark of the pair, and an object lesson for other production teams in Adelaide, that paying attention to the little details produces huge results, and elevates a show from merely good to great.

Rosanne Hosking plays Diana, a nuclear mother just barely keeping massive emotional problems buried so her family can lead a normal life. It's a situation that could never end well, and Hosking drags the audience through a torturous but brilliant performance as Diana takes a screaming nose-dive to rock bottom.

Paul Talbot is impressive as husband Dan, the rock holding the family together. Talbot's acting chops get an impressive workout, and though he seldom gets the best lines, he makes his material work for him, injecting deadpan gallows humour into scenes which really need it and keeping the audience on the dry side of the break-down-and-cry threshold.

Mitchell Sanfilippo gives a heartwarming-cum-chilling performance as golden child Gabe, who is simultaneously his mother's best friend and worst enemy. Gabe is arguably the antagonist, and if the audience boos him at the end, Sanfilippo should wear it as a badge of honour more impressive than if they just applauded him; he skirts the fine line of inspiring actual hatred.

Emma Bargery gives a powerhouse performance as Natalie, the forgotten overachiever struggling to live in Gabe's shadow. Her big number, 'Superboy and the Invisible Girl', is one of the show's standout scenes. A few opening night jitters work themselves out within about ten minutes of the curtain going up.

Rod Schultz gets to show off his impressive versatility as Diana's battery of doctors, running the full gamut from let's-talk-about-your-childhood to take-two-dozen-and-call-me-in-the-morning. Schultz's doctors are hilarious and stop the audience from falling into the slough of despond themselves.

The show falls down in one aspect, which is not the fault of anyone involved in the production. Scott Reynolds' character, Natalie's love interest Henry, is not as well-developed as the other characters. It's not Reynolds' fault; he does great things with what he's given, and by the end of the show is the emotional rock the family's stability is anchored on. It's just that he's not given much from the show itself.



Adelaide Theatre Guide

www.theatreguide.com.au

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

Set design is an obvious David Lampard work: simple, effective and impressive. Less is more here; productions still using stage trucks to create sets should heed the example set here.

Really, these words are for nought; you don't need me to tell you to see the show. It has a great cast and brilliant production team and will probably be one of the best things you see all year. If you miss it, you should probably be sectioned under the Mental Health Act yourself.