

Review: Schapelle, Schapelle

# ArtsHub

SUZIE GIBSON

As the headline act for Charles Sturt University's annual "Sprung Festival" – a two-week theatrical event – Schapelle, Schapelle is a sensation.



*The cast of Schapelle, Schapelle. Photographer Bree Davey.*

This musical comedy about Schapelle Corby's infamous Bali drug bust and subsequent 20-year prison term (that was eventually reduced to 9-years) provides a hilarious take on her family and the media frenzy that surrounded her.

This is not the first time that Corby's life has been turned into a musical comedy. In 2014, the University of Sydney Union hosted *Schapelle! The Musical*. One might assume that this earlier production, staged at a sandstone institution, would overshadow any subsequent effort to cover the same terrain. But Charles Sturt's Theatre/Media teachers and students have yet again proven that regional universities are centres of equally great talent, innovation and creativity.

*Schapelle, Schapelle* (the title evokes the fictional film *Rochelle, Rochelle*, a running gag in the 1990s TV series *Seinfeld*) is an inventive and extremely witty production that showcases the skills of numerous musicians, lyricists, singers, dancers, writers and actors.

**345**

Shares

Upon entering Charles Sturt's Ponton Theatre, audiences are immediately delighted by an extremely droll set featuring canary yellow boogie boards; the backdrop is decorated with the slogans 'Corby Fever 2005' and 'Schappelle's Media Circuit'. The set is decorative but also utilitarian – they operate as partitions separating a trio of musicians from the actors on stage. The musical stars – Gabbi Bort, Andrew Muldor and Daniel Gualterio – make an excellent threesome. Their individual and collective talent is virtuosic.

Also adorning the stage are kitsch Hawaiian tassels juxtaposed against fake bamboo. The beaches of Bali and Queensland are channelled through these decorative touches which transport the audience into subtropical environments. Indeed, what really elevates this musical comedy is its utterly 'troppo' humour.



*The cast of Schappelle Shappelle. Photographer Bree Davey.*

Lead Performer Mitch Lourigan is someone to watch. His acute sense of comic timing and ability to change into a series of characters – from Corby's father to a random crooner, a cheesy journalist and, finally, assuming the identity of the Bali 9's Renae Lawrence – is no easy feat yet he makes it seem effortless.

Riley Holland, who plays Schappelle's brother Mick, is another rising talent who proudly announces himself as a tattooed Brisbane Broncos supporter. His sister Mercedes Corby (Emily Waterson) is another comic standout whose facial expressions and vocal abilities push the boundaries of even this edgy comedy.

Schappelle's mother, Roseleigh Rose, played by Hannah Armstrong, is yet another performer to follow. Her hilarious obsession with making an 'upside down pineapple' cake is evocative of another influential Queensland matriarch, Flo Bjelke Petersen, who was famed for her pumpkin scones. And then there's the titular heroine Schappelle, the only 'straight' character in the mix. This is a difficult role to pull off and yet Sonia Dodd does it perfectly.

The scriptwriting and lyrics by Gareth Thompson, Jack Dodds and Mitch Lourigan cleverly nail down archetypal Australian types such as the ocker Mitch Logan. In this very intelligent production, we are also prompted to consider the media forces that have played a large role in shaping our perception of Schappelle and her family. Here I must mention the ensemble instrumentalists - Greygryn Holgate-Gorton, Barnaby Donaghy and Lewis Mitchell - who adopt various media roles and characters throughout. Their contribution is outstanding.

This production is extraordinarily clever, insightful and funny. It has pace and energy that captivates well after the final bows and applause. *Schappelle Schappelle* is not to be missed!

5 stars ★★★★★

### ***Schappelle Schappelle***

**Director: Abby Gallaway**

**Book&Lyrics/Production Manager: Gareth Thomson**

**Book&Lyrics/Composed/Musical Director: Jack Dodds**

**Book&Lyrics/Lead Performer: Mitch Lourigan**

**Composer/Lyricist/Associate Musical Director: Gabbi Bolt**

**Stage Manager: Alexandra Vidler**

**Assistant Stage Manager: Sophie Scanlon**

**Sound Designer/Engineer: Sam Mulligan**

**Costume Designer: Pearl Junoir**

**Lighting Designer/Operator: Adrian Vincze**

**Set Designer: Gabrielle Aubrey**

**Schappelle Corby: Sonia Dodd**

**Mercedes Corby: Emily Waterson**

**Roseleigh Rose: Hannah Armstrong**

**Mick Jnr. Riley Holland**

**Ensemble/Assistant Production Manager: Lewis Mitchell**

**Ensemble/Assistant Set Designer: Barnaby Donaghy**

**Ensemble: Greygryn Holgate-Gorton**

**Percussionist: Daniel Gualterio**

**Guitarist: Andrew Worlton**

**19-29 September 2018**

**Charles Sturt University's Ponton Theatre**

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#### **What the stars mean?**

- **Five stars:** Exceptional, unforgettable, a must see
- **Four and a half stars:** Excellent, definitely worth seeing
- **Four stars:** Accomplished and engrossing but not the best of its kind
- **Three and a half stars:** Good, clever, well made, but not brilliant
- **Three stars:** Solid, enjoyable, but unremarkable or flawed
- **Two and half stars:** Neither good nor bad, just adequate
- **Two stars:** Not without its moments, but ultimately unsuccessful
- **One star:** Awful, to be avoided
- **Zero stars:** Genuinely dreadful, bad on every level

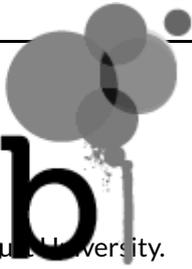
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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