

Review: *In Between* and *Sexpectations*, Sprung Festival

Artshub

SUZIE GIBSON

Charles Sturt University's Theatre/Media studies students have wowed audiences once again with two new 'Sprung Festival' productions – *In Between* and *Sexpectations*.



Sprung Festival's In Between. Photo by Bree Davey.

These impressive plays, *In Between* and *Sexpectations*, showcase the skills of writers, directors, actors, set designers, sound engineers and audio-visual artists. While each production is thematically and stylistically different, they nonetheless explore a broad range of themes, including grief, love, longing and sexuality.

IN BETWEEN

In Between is very much a mood piece that sensitively deals with grief. Ellie Wilson's world class ambient music immediately enables audiences to become immersed within a nether world of complex emotions. Her sound design powerfully stirs feelings and sensations in a manner that is deeply evocative of former Roxy Music member Brian Eno's ground-breaking 'ambient' soundscapes. The visual design of this production is also superior. Jack Thompson's subtle lighting palette and Hollie Rotherham's dark fairy-tale setting suspends actors and audience members alike within a shadow world.

This play, about a parent's grief over the death of their child, foregrounds extreme suffering. For many this might be confronting, but what is so important about *In Between* is its emotional intelligence. Kiara Martin's delicate work as a grieving Abigail alive and Natesha Ham plays her extremely well. Supporting Abigail are two other-worldly creatures in 'Mot' (Emma Van Veen) and 'Enid' (Cassie Miller). These antler-adorned characters are kindly sprites who add a great deal of whimsy and pathos to proceedings. Sometimes in the far background a 'Stranger' (Max Wilson) appears – we don't know who he is, but he looks like a doctor. A stand out moment is when Abigail and this Stranger engage in a mimed conversation where all we hear is a sustained ambient roar.

Much of *In Between's* brilliance can be found in what it does not say or articulate, and as such it reveals the extraordinary power of grief as a sensation that thwarts conventional forms of representation.

5 stars ★★★★★

In Between

Director: Alexandra Moon

Writer/Head of Design/Make up: Kiara Martin

Production Manager: Jana Vass

Stage Manager: Taylor Dawson

Cast-Stranger/Assistant Stage Manager: Max Wilson

Cast-Mirror/Set Designer/Fabricator: Hollie Rotherham

AV Designer/Operator: Beth Fragar

Sound Designer: Ellie Wilson

Lighting Designer/Operator: Jack Thompson

Cast-Abigail: Natesha Ham

Cast-Mot: Emma Van Veen

Cast-Enid: Cassie Miller



Artie Hotchkies and Roan Van Heekeren in *Sexpectations*. Photo by Sophie Fitzgerald.

SEXPECTATIONS

On the other hand, *Sexpectations* provides an insightful critique of conventional forms of representation. The traditional division between masculinity and femininity is memorably staged through Naomi Soane's set design that juxtaposes a classically pink female bedroom against a blue boyish bedchamber. Respectively sitting on the bed in each room is a young woman (Artie Hotchies) and a man (Roan Van Heekeren). Between them is a large screen that broadcasts a series of familiar TV programs and personalities – *Friends*, *The Simpsons*, *Getaway*, and Steven Irwin. Later these images will meditate more forcefully upon gender stereotypes and how they are ingrained at childhood.

The meticulously organised 'female' bedroom exhibits a number of 'feminine' items – a mirror, a pink flamingo lamp and pastel coloured furnishings, while the 'male' equivalent displays a lava lamp, no mirror and a bedspread that is 'appropriately' navy. One might assume that this misé-en-scene sustains gender stereotypes when in fact it reveals just how glib and simplistic they are. The performers, Roan and Artie, also provide compelling arguments against identity straight-jackets where women are expected to be modest and lady-like and men are supposed to be assertive 'fixer-uppers'.

Sexpectations is a clever and entertaining dialogue between two talented actors with loads of charisma. The messages the play puts out carries a wisdom beyond the years of those responsible: live authentically and unselfishly. In this regard, writer Sophie Fitzgerald should be commended for her generosity, perception and intelligence.

Both *In Between* and *Sexpectations* are highly accomplished productions, however the formers profound handling of grief deserves special recognition. Certainly, both plays make one feel confident about the future when it is in the hands of such wise, creative and intelligent young people.

Also keep an eye out for two more new productions being performed this week at Charles Sturt University – *Rumble* and *I Will Be King* (September 26, 27, 28 and 29). This year's 'Sprung Festival' has already produced some outstanding plays and so these new productions promise to deliver great things.

4 ½ stars ★★★★★☆

Sexpectations

Director/Dramaturg: Zoe Floyd

Writer/Verbatim Collector: Sophie Fitzgerald

Production Manager/Head of Design: Naomi Soane

Stage Manager: Brittany Myers

Assistant Set Designer: Saskia Channing

Ass. Stage Manager/Lighting Operator: Josie Hughes

Sound/AV Designer: Tyson Mendham

Female Cast/Costume: Artie Hotchies

Male Cast/Costume: Roan Van Heekeren

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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:** Either good or bad, just adequate
- **Two stars:** Not without its merits, but ultimately unsuccessful
- **One star:** Awful, to be avoided
- **Zero stars:** Genuinely dreadful, bad on every level



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Suzie Gibson is a Senior Lecturer in English at Charles Sturt University.

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