Splinters getting T.H.I.R.S.T.Y

STAGE

By Gordon Sheldon

T.H.I.R.S.T., the major production of the Splinters Theatre Company for this year, is a collaboration between writer Christopher Barnett, Melbourne director Nico Lathouris and Splinters.

Lathouris has worked regularly with Barnett's performance texts and Splinters — the "Theatre of Spectacle" - has performed versions of the writer's work over the past six years.

Barnett, who learned his craft from his father, an Adelaide television script writer, now works in France. Barnett was visiting Australia at the right time and Splinters seized the opportunity to work with him on the new performance piece.

Nico Lathouris is an experienced performance director and actor, with several notable film appearances. He played in *Heartbreak Kid*, for which he was nominated for an AFT award as best supporting actor, and in *Death in Brunswick* and *Where the Green Ants Dream*, with Sam Neill.

"*T.h.i.r.s.t.* is a montage of several of my performance pieces which we have adapted in rehearsal," Barnett said.

"It concentrates on the way actors speak, gaze and listen and how they involve the audience. Actors must listen to the audience, even to their stillness. There is a rhythm in the way they react to each other. In the process there are transformations within individuals and within groups, transformations from being to knowing.

"The play is as much about ideas as characters. It is relevant to any survivor of the modern condition, dealing with humanity's capacity to hurt and be hurt, to be loved and to love. Its power lies in the ability to affect the audience as much as the protagonists."

T.h.i.r.s.t (the full stops are symbolic of the breaths taken by actors) explores the characters of a small desert town, whose lives are interrupted by the arrival of three strangers. The first is a half-dead man seemingly trapped by the past. The second and third strangers are drawn to the first, but are bound to transform the individuals of the town. The characters are driven by fate to the place where events inevitably force them to come face to face with their shadows. They can run, but cannot hide; they must face their fear.

Splinters has achieved a national reputation for its original, exciting, sometimes startling productions. The professional group has played frequently in Canberra and in other major Australian centres and was voted Best Promenade Theatre of the 1992 Adelaide Festival. *T.h.i.r.s.t.* has a cast of about 30, including a chorus of 12 directed by Renald Navarro. The principal characters are played by David Branson, Lyndal Curcton, Bronwen Gault, Stephen Howard, Justine Lawler, Anne-Marie Sinclair and Patrick Troy. They have worked closely with Lathouris and Barnett on the development of characters and text.

"*T.h.i.r.s.t.*" opens in Building F, National Exhibition Centre on Wednesday for a season ending on September 4. Enquiries and bookings on 2414201.