# Challenging AIDS plays at Heaven



THEATRE

By ANN NUGENT

THREE short plays for World AIDS Day are being presented at Heaven Night Club, Garema Place, this week.

*Proof Positive*, a monodrama written by one of America's leading gay writers, Robert Patrick, portrays a man in his forties, facing the last stages of his illness. The play is both moving and funny — it is the "funny AIDS play" that the dying man asks his friend to write. The program features two Australian plays, *The Reunion*, an erotic play written by Alex Harding, and a quasi-documentary play, *Roses on the Moon*, by Campion Decent. Decent has adapted interviews with people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS to make a poetic theatre piece. In *Roses on the Moon* six characters recount their personal and interconnected stories with each other and the audience.

All three plays are directed by director and NIDA graduate David Atfield. The casts include three talented Canberra actors: Jonathan Gavin, Anne-Louise Rentell and Iain Sinclair.

The World AIDS Day performance on Thursday commences at 7.30pm, with Friday and Saturday performances starting at 8pm. Tickets cost $8, which includes entry into Heaven, and go on sale at 7pm and during intervals. Patrons are invited to stay on at the club after the show.

Three main-stage shows are running in Canberra this week. Rep is finishing its theatre year with a sparkling production of *Blithe Spirit*. Noel Coward's comedy is a fund of laughs. Rep's *Spirit* is also a nostalgic journey into the more leisured and stylish world of art deco 1930s.

*Blithe Spirit* plays Wednesdays to Saturdays until December 10, with a matinee on December 3 at 2pm. Matinee tickets cost $15 and full-price ticket is $22. Bookings can be made by phoning 257 1950.

The season of David Mamet's play *Oleanna*, has been extended for a week, until December 3, at the Playhouse, Canberra Theatre Centre. The abrupt and shock ending of Mamet's play leaves audiences not so much reeling as frozen. Throughout the play the audience is asked to process so much information, so rapidly and all of it coming from opposing points of view — narrow feminist fundamentalism versus the largesse of a taken-for-granted male power base. The ending, instead of resolving the issue, rather throws the viewer back on his or her own uncertainty.

Michael Gow directs the Sydney Theatre Company production, which stars Geoff Morrell as John, the university lecturer, and Elizabeth Maywald as Carol, his seemingly simple student. Don't miss this one. Bookings on 257 1077.

The other main-stage piece is a two-hander at the Currong Theatre, Batman Street, Braddon. Melbourne-based actor and film maker John Brumpton joins up with Canberra performer Lisa Angove in *Low*, a rather depressing story of two lonely young lovers drifting on the edge of society. Emma and Jay, the young lovers, are the detritus of an affluent society. They fill the incredible emptiness of their lives with petty thefts so they can share the thrill of danger. As they add violence to their crimes they get a buzz (albeit transitory) from feeling powerful. Indeed, their robberies are the only drama, the only colour, in their otherwise dull lives.

Playwright Daniel Keene has written a tragedy of modern life as it is lived on the fringe — but how depressingly grey it is.

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The problem with shows like Low is that people often go to the theatre to forget their own "low" feelings. Noel Coward wrote *Blithe Spirit* in the middle of war-time rationing, but the war-time deprivations and suffering never break the surface of his comedy. In contrast, *Low* is unremittingly gloomy. So if you looking for a little gloom take in *Low*, even if you are not *Low* is sure to convince you that things could be much worse. *Low* plays Tuesdays to Saturdays until December 10. Tickets cost $15 and $10 concessions and booking can be made on 247 2133.

Club Currong follows the *Low* performance on Saturday nights at 10pm. The club is a mix of local talents comic and musical. Entry costs $12 and $8 concessions. Bookings on 247 2133.

Narrabundah College is host to Oz*fest* — the International Schools Theatre Association High School Festival of drama, which runs over next weekend, December 2 to 5, at the college campus. This is the first time the international festival has been held in Australia. Students are arriving from Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and other places to take part in the packed program of workshops and plays.

The festival will be opened by the ACT Minister for Education and Training, Bill Wood, on Friday, when the Gloworms Youth Theatre will perform a traditional Aboriginal welcome.

Also in the program is *Oh My God Bambi*, a parody of teenage life written and performed by students from Telopea Park School. Festival participants will see a performance by Skylark Theatre Company of its show *Pocket Size*.

Workshops are being led by a number of Canberra theatre practioners, including Stephen Champion, of Jigsaw; Sue Healy, artistic director of Vis-a-Vis Dance Company; and Renald Navarro, of Tango 160 — a depth of Canberra talent. As is becoming customary

Tango 160 — a depth of Canberra talent. As is becoming customary in Canberra, Splinters Theatre of Spectacle is orchestrating the closing ceremony event. Peter Wilkins, festival host director, can be contacted on 205 6979.

This is the last week to catch *Chicago*, a musical vaudeville, now running at the ANU Arts Centre. The Canberra Philharmonic production finishes on Saturday. Bookings can be made by phoning 257 1077.

Phoenix Players have chosen *Aladdin* for its Christmas pantomime. Aladdin plays at the Belconnen Community Centre, December 2 to 4, and 9 to 11, and December 16 and 17 at 7.30pm. Weekend matinees are offered at 1.30pm and bookings can be made by phoning 257 1077.

*The Bull n' Bush Christmas Party* continues at the School of Arts Cafe, Queanbeyan, Thursdays to Saturdays until December 31. Bookings for dinner and show on 297 6857.

At Tarzan's Theatre Restaurant, Holt, the *Horror Show* is in full swing into the New Year. Bookings for dinner and show on 254 6123.