

Baraki 2010

It is fashionable among a certain generation of theatregoers to suggest there is something old-fashioned, even reactionary, about story-telling. Yet you only have to observe an audience for playwright Bill Kokkaris' latest piece, *Baraki 2010* (baraki translates from colloquial Greek as the little bar or my bar) to see how helplessly we are transfixed by a gripping narrative. Kokkaris understands the human need for stories and Take Away Theatre's production holds us spellbound.

In some ways this is strange. On the surface, it doesn't look as if there is much to Kokkaris' latest piece, a black comedy based on an original one-act version first performed at Newtown's Steki restaurant in 1999. Set in a trendy bar in Sydney's inner west where everyone knows your name and strong drinks are served with strong language and a twist of lemon, it at first appears to be about nothing more than a group of regulars and a barman to whom they tell their stories. Soon after last orders are called, they drink up and go their separate ways. It gets no more complex than that.

Yet in highly regarded Melbourne director Tony Nikolopoulos' production on an authentically contemporary Greek bar-room set, the power of these tales pulls us in. We may sense the playwright is toying with the clichés of Greek-Australian culture, juxtaposing a belief in spiritual guardian angels with a very modern world of second and third generation Greeks. But even if we suspect Kokkaris of playing mind games with us, it makes us no more resistant to his gift for a well-told tale.

It means that as the characters' stories move seamlessly from idle conversations with the barman to disturbingly real conversations with their ancestors, we are very susceptible to their power. On the one hand, their characters are defined by their loneliness and loss but on the other, they are momentarily relieved of their pain in the act of sharing it in a bar where everyone knows their name. Coming from Take Away Theatre, a company so named because its home is above a yeeros shop in Marrickville, this seems all the more apt.

Thanks to the tremendous heart the performers bring to the tale, you'll no doubt feel that you indeed know them as you follow the twists and turns in their lives. Chris Argirousis' performance as the



womanising barman Michael who serves up drinks and trades one-liners with the regulars, is commanding. Bringing a natural feel to the role, his tantalising charm masks a hidden past. Veronica Clavijo has her own inimitable style



that combines tradition and innovation in the role of Teena while in haunting performances Giorgos Samartzis as Nick and Aleko Kladas in his commendable acting debut as Ilias move the audience from laughter to tears in unguarded moments. All are well supported by Melinda Nassif and Sophia Kintominas, both giving strong performances their own stories to tell in their respective roles of Jenny and Mary.

Tssoula Kallenou's powerful portrait of the spiritual guardian angel employs a unique blend of movement, song and drama to negotiate a complex and multidimensional narrative. Not only moving in itself, it also reminds us of the

therapeutic function of a community coming together to share its stories in an effort to make sense of a cruel world. With a voice of extraordinary clarity and depth and a dominant stage presence, her performance far transcends the boundaries of song and language. It is the warm, earthly sounds of the human heart – elements that so often set us apart, but occasionally bring us together.

The play is staged in a new theatre space in the lower level of the Cyprus Community Club in Stanmore, a disused space until its breathtaking transformation. With an authentic sense of place, symmetry and proportion we are mes-

merised even before the actors enter, firstly by the ingeniously simple makeover of the foyer complete with the sweet scent of Greek incense and then by an uncommonly simple and intimate set. Unpretentiously accessible, not unlike the script itself, the set draws immediately you into the heart of the play. This simplicity is reiterated in costume and props, minimal lighting and Dimitra Tzodouris' stunning musical arrangements from Greece's new wave period.

Since 1989 Take Away Theatre has championed relevant, accessible and contemporary theatrical explorations of multicultural Australia that are not limited in relevance to just the Greek-Australian community. *Baraki 2010* creatively touches on universal themes for that audience which appreciates the nuances of culture, place and past and attempts to reconcile all three through the threads of storytelling, music, song and dance joining generations.

If you are looking for heart and soul in a theatre piece, with a few centuries worth of yarns thrown in for good measure, then *Baraki 2010* might be just the ticket you seek. Playing until October 10, it is provocative and edgy. Enjoy the journey.

By Marcus Megalokonomos



Showing till 10 October

Downstairs Bar,
Cyprus Community Centre
58 Stanmore Rd, Stanmore NSW
Performances: Wednesday - Saturday 8pm
Sunday performances 7pm

TICKETS

\$30 and \$25 concession, except Wednesday performances, which are \$15 nights.
For bookings call: 02 9990 4980
Email: contact@takeawaytheatre.com.au