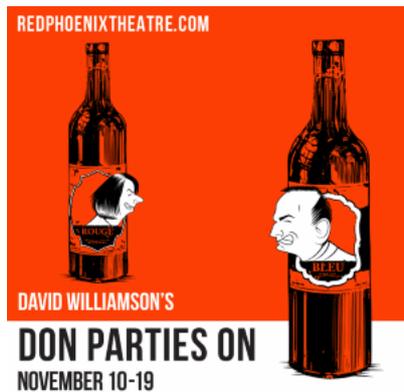


Don Parties On



Red Phoenix Theatre. Holden Street Theatres. 12 Nov 2016

Nostalgia is dangerous. The good old days always glow with the good moments, omitting the bad. Omitting opportunity for serious well rounded reflection.

As Director Michael Eustice's program note observes, *Don Parties On* revisits the world and characters of David Williamson's *Don's Party* some 40 years on from the fabled 'It's Time' 1972 election. What Williamson, revisiting the past in context of the Abbott versus Gillard election, uncovers on the gender opportunity front is profoundly disturbing given the hard fought for gains of the '70s and their repudiation by the vicious attack on Julia Gillard.

Don (Wayne Anthony), mates Mal (Adrian Barnes) and Cooley (Brian Godfrey) are still free thinking larrikin Aussie blokes beneath four decades of marriage, children and divorce. They gather on election night at Don's expressing a peculiar blend of blokey bravado of a bygone age with a stark social and political cynicism at odds with their supposed progressive thinking and beliefs. Cooley is hysterically funny as he pops an iPod Classic into a speaker dock to blare out a 70s classic, dancing like an old man manic, only to suddenly reach for his carry on oxygen bottle inhaler. Don too is enthusiastic. Mal, laughingly looks on.

The quarter cut sandwiches and olive, cheese and salami on sticks are still there, but, what happened to the thinking? The way Don's wife Kath (Julie Quick) is constantly putting out spot fires here and there, you'd be forgiven thinking there never was a 70s progressive social movement.

Williamson's script flows with the rabid laughs *Don's Party* is famous for, only tinged with a shade of blackness darkening the humour to the right degree of thought provoking discomfort.

This engaging, challenging discomfort covers pretty much every subject you could



Menu



The fascinating, painful, at times ugly to and fro between the men and women, observed quietly in the background by Belle, brilliantly throws stark personal experience against the political reality of Gillard’s treatment. Further exploring the seismic shifts of generational change, the challenging relationship Don’s married son Richard (Brant Eustice) has, feeling a failure, having an affair with another challenging woman, Roberta (Jessica Carroll) and managing things with daughter Belle and his parents throws more darkly comic fuel onto the fire.

Eustice's direction, aided by wonderfully sound characterisation and comic timing by the ensemble, ensures the clash of nostalgia, historical reality and personal experience flows evenly, striking notes of revelation at the perfect moment.

“We’ve won” Cooley exuberantly calls, as the hung parliament election night is called. But what did Australia really ‘win’ that night, as Don’s party of anger, regret, nostalgia, cynical disdain and very real pain after 40 years?

David O’Brien

When: 10 to 19 Nov

Where: Holden Street Theatres, The Studio

Bookings: holdenstreettheatres.com or (08) 8225 8888

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