

## Cultural cauldron is still bubbling away at the edges

PERHAPS the recession works for, and not against, fringe theatre, but I suspect the success of alternative theatre productions in Melbourne has more to do with this city's diversity of audiences. There are a number of specialised audience groups who are loyal, enthusiastic and happy to pay the modest ticket prices charged by dramatic groups who count success as recovered costs, not profit.

The recent return season at St Martins of *'twixt*, one of last year's Spoleto Fringe successes, saw a waiting list for every performance. This intriguing piece of movement theatre starred Teresa Blake, 1991 winner of the Green Room Award for Best Supporting Actress in Robyn Archer's *Cafe Fledermaus*.

There she performed a stunning sword dance. In *'twixt* her Circus Oz training was used in a fascinating exercise in expressing ideas through the body, with a good dash of irreverent humour thrown in as well.

*Delores Street*, a thoroughly engaging "coming out" play about the lesbian subculture of San Francisco, might have been expected to appeal to a narrow and specialised audience. In fact its season was extended several times as word got around about a

### Theatre

*Delores Street* by Theresa Carilli  
*Crying In Public Places, Marg  
And The Beast*, Judy Pascoe  
*'twixt* by Teresa Blake and Daniel  
Witton.

*Lines In The Desert* by Going  
Through Stages

*Requestconcert* by Franz Xavier  
Kroetz

Reviewed by Helen Thomson

finely-acted comedy which both celebrated women's lives and wryly sent up ideological solemnity.

Meanwhile there has been more women's theatre at the Universal Theatre, with plenty of thoroughly entertained men in the audience. Judy Pascoe's stand-up comedy routine featured the Australian Pig as seen in foreign places as well as on her/his own local ground. Shirley Billing and Margaret Dobson were merciless in their bizarre routine as a couple of beauticians, selling a female fiction they neither represented nor believed in.

The *a capella* group *Crying In Public Places* cried and sang their way through a brilliant routine of changing moods and

responses, which again both celebrated and sent up female experience.

Meanwhile, certainly not being funny was Peter King's group *Going Through Stages*, performing an obscure piece called *Lines In The Desert* at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art. Mine was a negative response to what seemed an esoteric and self-indulgent exercise in semiotic theatre, which puzzled without rewarding the watcher with moments of dramatic insight.

*La Mama* has a play by contemporary German playwright Franz Xavier Kroetz, directed by Wendy Joseph and played with beautiful timing and control by Diana O'Connor.

In complete silence we watch the unremarkable evening in the life of an anonymous woman, living alone in a small apartment. Our minds are irresistibly impelled to ask questions, to enter into this woman's life until a dramatic conclusion is reached which is as devastating as it is inevitable — a totally compelling, daring piece of theatre.

Nearly all these productions will have good to full houses, proof of the cultural cauldron bubbling away in Melbourne, a sure sign of its theatrical good health.