

Mockingbird

Reviews /Feedback

Mockingbird Season at The Maidment Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand October 2014

Review

A great solo show called Mockingbird by Lisa Brickell with cool sounds and live music by Sarah Macombée of Macombée & the Absolute Truth. It's the story of four generations of women, whakapapa & belonging. Brickell is wonderfully expressive with cheeky fluidity, and the show is as riveting as it is entertaining.

- Wai Reid & Jarred Tito, NZ Entertainment

"This show is really good entertainment in that it deals with quite difficult subject matter in a warm-hearted comic way. It does not trivialise the issue of mental health nor oversimplify it. Rather it creates a platform for a lot of thought, dialogue and humour.

After the show the group that I went with engaged in great discussions, which is always the sign of a well-made piece of high quality work. The musical element of the show was executed beautifully and gave the work a real richness. I would love to see this work tour. It is the kind of work that as well as being a great night out will open up a lot of people to share and think about how to take care of themselves and others with mental illness."

-Anna Marbrook –Director

"For me the play brought Post Natal Depression into the continuum of human experience, which normalised something that is usually very stigmatized. It also highlighted the importance of meaningful support."

-Scott MacNevin – Mental Health Consultant

"Wow, such an amazing show last night, thank you! Very clever and funny, but pulled my heart strings too, having struggled with Post Natal Depression myself. Really fantastic that you could convey such an emotional, rarely spoken about issue in an open, accessible way."

-Bronwyn - Mother

"Mockingbird is a thought-provoking play that raises awareness of issues around Post Natal Depression. The story highlights that the unspoken stigma of mental illness isolates the person with emotional difficulties, and their sense of shame grows in isolation. Mockingbird gives us a real picture of the struggles of people with depression."

-Seiko Shirai - Psychotherapist

Mockingbird Seasons at The Basement and Te Pou Theatres, Auckland, New Zealand October 2016

Reviews

This is the most wonderful show, deeply moving, hysterically funny with a twist that takes you to the darkest of places and returns you to the light.

The show opens with the lights coming up on a dark simple set with a cot, a coat stand and the sound of a baby crying and a woman moaning. It suddenly stops. 'It's alright,' beams the winsome and slightly gauche Tina, 'It's only a dream'. A recurrent nightmare, more like. Tina, one of many characters played by Lisa Brickell, has managed to successfully avoid the baby conversation for decades when her boyfriend surprises her with the confession that he wants to have kids and not just one, but lots. He is opening a can of worms and she doesn't handle it well. Women raising the subject of babies are aware that their lovers may run to the hills at the prospect – that sort of reaction from a woman comes to him as a surprise. What he doesn't know and Tina can't say is that she has a family history not conducive to parenthood. Her mother, grandmother and great grandmother all suffered from terrible postnatal depression and Tina's very real terror that she may fall into madness herself is stoked by an old 'auntie' who takes a perverse pleasure in recounting her mother's and grandmother's failures. If she is to go forward however she has to confront her family's past.

This could have been a grim story in the vein of Janet Frame or The Hours but Lecoq-trained Brickell is a natural clown and plays all her characters with a mix of earnestness and humour, ably supported by deadpan musician, actor and singer Sarah Macombee who provides a musical accompaniment on the keyboard. There is a great connection between the two performers, one sings a fragment that introduce new characters that the other picks up, creating an atmospheric linking between the scenes. Also interspersed are old recordings of the music of the era.

If some moments are terribly sad, some are hysterically funny. I loved it when Tina's mother has managed to escape home and moves to a commune in Coromandel to get high. There is an element of Ab Fab's Patsy and Edina in Macombee and Brickell bouncing off each other beautifully while the long-suffering Doug does all the hard work keeping the chooks off the conversation pit.

The script is witty, well-observed, and well-performed – Brickell and Macombee comfortably slip in and out of character, likeable or otherwise – and the exploration of the subject is as compassionate as it is wise. Brickell does not condemn the characters involved nor overdramatise their suffering but simply shows them trying their best in the most difficult of circumstances. It is shocking enough. By this approach, and directly talking to them she includes her audience rather than fighting with them and presents a denouement that offers hope rather than revenge. Many theatre productions hope to break down taboos around mental health, I think that here they succeed, and they cannot be praised highly enough. For anyone who has been or known a mother who needed support and didn't get it, this play will resonate. Highly recommended.

-Alex Bonham, *What's Good*

Playing all the characters, Brickell lends an enthusiastic energy to her performances, particularly with her physicality as she dances and twirls, juxtaposing wonderfully with the oppressive domesticity her characters endure... Brickell's miming and character changes work well with the bare set, which leaves our imaginations to fill the space.

The musician's presence is well integrated into the structure, and her inappropriately upbeat songs capture the blackly comic potential of the show. Her music is a careful balancing between funny and depressing that turns the everyday horrors into the comically over the top.

-Joe Nathan, *Theatre Scenes*

"I went to this play on Thursday last week at the Basement Theatre and took part in the Panel Discussion afterwards. It was an awesome example of how the arts are a powerful tool to share experiences, generate discussion, and promote social change across a broad range of audience. I cried...and laughed, and couldn't stop thinking and talking about it afterwards - that's the sign of an awesome performance in my view!"

-Margaret Lockhart, Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

"Saw Mockingbird last night. It was a great laugh and filled with fascinating connections. We all got it, felt it, loved it. The way you made the characters all work – and that scary spirit of nihilism in the mask- was just marvellous. It was simple but had resonance. That simplicity is something I find hard to get from my students. They all want devised work to be like a Hollywood movie. I loved the happy ending which felt very "real". And wondrous. Congratulations on a fabulous show. Lovely muso/chorus/conscience/sfx/best friend role too."

-Bruce de Grut, Drama Teacher, Takapuna Grammar School

"I was fortunate enough to catch this 5 star performance last night. Wow - like the rest of the audience, I was blown away by the skillful and poignant treatment of the potentially challenging subject of postnatal depression.

Lisa and Sarah are magic together! Just witnessing the way they spark off each other is worth the price of admission!

Tight script, efficient use of props, crystal clear and often hilarious characterisation -all contribute to seamless storytelling revealing the emotional heart of this production - an important story that needs to be told and shared far and wide..."

-Roxy Ferguson

"Awesome show! I loved the intimate, comic interplay between the two of you. Delightful and touching. Beautiful embodiment of a range of characters. So inspiring!"

-Jane Larsen

"Saw this last night and so rate it! Had me cry-laughing and laugh-crying all the way through."

-Monica Evans

“One awesome show. I have not laughed so much but also was nearly in tears. As a Mum some things were close to the bone. Some parts were so accurate as a service user! We both loved it, so well done!!!”

-Saskia Hawke

“Beautiful storytelling, humour, music and poignancy. We loved every minute! Thank you for your meaningful, joyful, timely work.”

-Kat Wong

Norway Tour August 2017

Reviews

I really liked having the musician on stage. I loved the interplay between the actor and musician. The music and voices bring another layer to the performance. Especially when we are talking about mental health, we are exploring voices in our head and other things so this inner/outer dialogue worked really well.

-Nathanael Josua Larsson, Artistic Director, Spinae Company, Stord Theatre, Norway

I had goose bumps watching the play, and I also laughed a lot. It was a very strong story and I could really relate to it, especially the topic of mental health and how it has been treated in the past, and the effect it had on those families. I liked the way there weren't many props, costumes or set and the way the actors changed between so many different characters. The two performers had a great connection. The musician's voice and the music added another dimension to the experience. Mental health isn't talked about much in Norway, it's kept hidden, even though Norway has one of the highest rates of suicide in the developed world. So it was great to see a show that brings it out into the open and reduces stigma around mental health.

- Magdalena f. Delis, Sunnhordland, Stord

“I thought it was a very touching story. You made it so clear and alive, I was deeply moved.”

-Foster mum of an adult daughter

“I thought it was a really good play. All mothers can recognize themselves in this - having a baby and the insecurities that come along with not knowing what to do.”

-Mother of 3 and Grandmother of 3

-Lifjorden, Norway

“The mask work was very strong. Strongly symbolizing the characters in our head. The music brought a lot of humour, evoked atmosphere and helped with transitions. I really identified with having a new baby and not knowing what to do and being barraged with advice from every corner, which is often completely contradictory, so it makes things even more confusing!”

- Rosendal, Norway

Sydney Tour February 2018

Review

Mockingbird is a darkly comedic family history, of sorts. Energetic counsellor and narrator Tina dances and sways her way through four generations of her family, from her great-grandmother to herself. Her ancestor's storylines adopts a similar flow: woman meets man, woman gives birth, woman gets locked away for poor mental health. And not just any condition – each woman is diagnosed with postpartum affective disorder (PPD), a mood disorder that can closely follow giving birth.

Writer and lead actor Lisa Brickell developed the script of Mockingbird in consultation with New Zealand's Changing Minds organisation, which seeks to educate and reduce stigma around mental health. Consequently, the mission of Mockingbird is very clear in the way it challenges preconceptions and assumptions about women's health in particular. In a world that's quick to dismiss women as being overly emotional, PPD is an issue both poorly understood and rarely discussed. Many of Tina's ancestors are dragged away to the nuthouse for traumatic electroshock therapy when all they're experiencing is a crippling lack of support.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Mockingbird makes a point of injecting ample comedy into what could otherwise be an extremely somber production. Both Lisa Brickell and her accompanist (and occasional voice-in-the-back-of-her-head) Siri Embla are trained clowns who pull off wonderful impressions and burst into humorous songs with plenty of back-and-forth. While there are many sobering moments, the overall tone is light, helping the audience digest the heavy matter at its heart.

Mockingbird is a clever, sensitive exploration of mental health. Funny and moving, it sheds light on an issue that affects many people but remains taboo even in our modern society.

-Sam Baran, Sambaranmedia, Sydney

"I thought the performance was extremely powerful and very touching. I feel that Post Natal Psychosis has been put in the 'too hard basket' by health care professional, so this was wonderful to get PNP out of the bucket!"

"I thoroughly enjoyed the play and thought it promoted empathy towards sufferers."

"It used the 'serous laugh' very effectively...the power of sharing experiences."

"Congratulations on an important endeavour and a wonderful performance."

"Fantastic performance, shedding light on an un-talked about subject."

"Thank you for a great insight into post natal psychosis. Well written, researched and performed. I hope that it is shared more with the medical profession – should be performed at the University where they are in training, also with secondary school age children and in country areas."

"Really enjoyed the performance. Working as a medical doctor with some training in psychiatry, it is really refreshing to look at post natal psychosis from a patient's perspective and not just clinical symptoms. Well done to everyone in the team."

"Fabulous performance. My mother had post natal depression and was taken to Callen Park and given ECT and it really messed her up. I am also someone with lived experience of emotional distress. It was all about community and connection and this is the most important thing."

"This was the most moving, intelligent, well-informed drama-comedy that I have ever seen. It is powerful at every level and it should be used in a multi-media format to educate medical/nursing professionals and the general public. It should be used to promote funding for much needed mother and baby psychiatric units to promote healing and a positive outcome for mothers who suffer with this condition. It is in their childrens', families' and the communities' best interest. Politicians need to listen and put the funds in the bucket."

"Fantastic production! Amazing insights! Amazing stories! I want this to be a film!!! Wonderful work."

"I saw 'Mockingbird' last night at 107. I was quite impacted by the story and the wider societal functions that informed the story. You and your team are doing really important work. Addressing incredibly difficult and complex themes that exist within modern day society. Whilst oppression against women is so saddening you theatrical talent was incredible in opening this dialogue. Whilst I haven't had children, I always think about my mother's life and the enormous sacrifice she made for my siblings and I. How unnoticed and under appreciated. Last night was helpful an encouraging towards a greater understanding of what mothers overcome post childbirth."

"Wonderful show – I learned so much and it was so moving to see stories that echo so much of my own experiences in different ways. Amazing performers, fantastic writing – so engaging, moving, intelligent and fun."

"Brilliant! Get this out there! The more exposure, the better the outcome."

Garnet Station, Auckland Season March 2018

"Mockingbird is simply one of the best plays I have ever watched. Having suffered from post natal depression and anxiety, this show was very meaningful to me. It made me laugh, cry and laugh again. What I loved about it is that it addresses such an important and tragic topic with a comedic voice with an ending that encapsulates the radiance of positivity and hope. I highly recommend this must-see show to everyone, not just parents."

-Maza White

"The play was amazing!!! Such great performers! And the show is so well done!! Music, scenography and how you planned it...very smart!! It was funny, sad, emotional, passionate...all together! Was wonderful!! Really well done! Thank you so much."

-Barbara Biglieri

"We absolutely loved it!! I thought it was just amazing. Warm, funny and moving, you're both so talented, congratulations."

-Sherryl Arneil

"Your play was poignant, funny and extremely impactful and uplifting. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Well done to both of you."

-Chantal Woodfine

"That was such a great, enjoyable and powerful piece of theatre - well done to you and your team!"

-Jocelyn Newport

"I laughed, I cried, I remembered how hard it was for those first years of my own children lives. Through Lisa's wonderful characterisations I really felt for the woman she portrayed. Beautifully acted with a great live soundtrack and an important message for those who need it the most-new Mums and their whanau. Highly recommend!"

-Nicole Whippy

Sydney Season October 2018

"Mockingbird was an incredibly intelligent, moving, powerful piece of art. Reflecting on my practice and mothering. This reinforced the very real need for us to be very sensitive to everyone's story."

"I loved seeing the Mockingbird performance. The visual drama really brought to light what you can't actually see e.g. negative thoughts."

"Mockingbird was raw, powerful and emotive."

"Mockingbird was an inspirational and moving production – very poignant."

Melbourne Season October 2018

Reviews

"Mockingbird tells the personal story and family history of Tina Crawford - (based on the real-life stories of Lisa Brickell and Siri Embla), a woman who became a psychologist to try and help herself with her personal issues surrounding why she is terrified of having children.

If you're thinking this story sounds rather dark and depressing - it's certainly not. This is a comedy. Certainly, it's a dark comedy but as the saying goes, "if you can't laugh, what can you do?..."

Mockingbird is engaging and funny and I would say it's definitely an hour well spent."

-Ree Maloney, Weekend Notes, Melbourne

<https://www.weekendnotes.com>

"Giving birth and becoming a mother are supposed to be some of the most fulfilling and happiest moments of a woman's life. Except when it's not. Postnatal depression (PND) affects 1 in every 7 women who give birth and in Mockingbird, writer and performer Lisa Brickell places PND under the spotlight.

Through comedy, cabaret and mask play, Brickell weaves a tale that follows four generations of women from one family...Brickell's portrayal of the four women is grounded in physicality and facial expressions...Joining Brickell on stage is musician Siri Embla who apart from performing on the piano also shows great talent at providing some of the sound effects for the show. Her energy and comedy timing when she plays some of the smaller characters in the show are nicely matched to Brickell's.

Today, there are many alternative treatments for PND and depression, but many people still feel unable to talk about it...Mockingbird has the potential to open up these conversations and give people the confidence to seek help and to no longer suffer alone."

-Myron My, My Melbourne Arts

<http://www.mymelbournearts.com>

Waipu October 2018

"I loved the precision timing, sound effects, switching of characters as well as the actual story of course. Brilliant. A unique experience."

"Plays like this will help greatly to break down the stigma surrounding mental health, and especially with women. Lots of food for thought!"

Audio Interviews

Radio interview with Sheldon Brown (edited broadcast)

www.takeitfromus.co.nz

Heavy Magazine

<https://heavymag.com.au/subculture-ep-023-mockingbird-interview/>

SYN Media - In Joke

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/podcast/in-joke/id1119033141?mt=2#>
<https://omny.fm/shows/in-joke/interview-with-lisa-brickell-mockingbird>

3CR - Arts Express

<https://www.3cr.org.au/artsexpress>

Audio no longer available. Emma has requested. 3CR contact to follow up: Trish Posterino
baycity12000@yahoo.com.au

Articles

NZ Herald

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/theatre/news/article.cfm?c_id=343&objectid=11720232

Art News Portal

<https://www.artnewsportal.com/art-news/mockingbird-a-comedy-about-motherhood-and-mental-health>

Medium- Lisa Brickell: Finding the serious laugh in post-natal depression

<https://medium.com/@mockingbirdcomedy/lisa-brickell-finding-the-serious-laugh-in-post-natal-depression-dd15aa9b6193>

SYN transcript

Theatre People - Lisa Brickell: Challenging the Taboo Around Mental Health

<http://www.theatrepeople.com.au/lisa-brickell-challenging-the-taboo-around-mental-health>