

STAGENOISE

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YELLOW MOON

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Another don't miss show at Belvoir Downstairs



Yellow Moon - the Ballad of Leila and Lee; white blackbird in association with B Sharp at Belvoir Downstairs, September 2-26, 2010. Photos by Patrick Boland.

PROLIFIC Scottish playwright **David Greig** originally wrote this in 2006 for **TAG** Theatre Company, the youth arm of Glasgow's the Citizens' Theatre; not that it matters to an adult audience. *Yellow Moon* is a **riveting** hour and 20 minutes of richly poetic and **contemporary** story-telling that should satisfy audiences of any age.

Aimless, restless 17-year-old Stag Lee Macalinden makes a series of almost **accidental** decisions that spin him, like a pinball, out of his dreary day-to-day **trajectory** onto a path he could never have **envisaged**. He has a fatal falling out with his mother's **yobbo** boyfriend; and he decides that the best way to make some fast bucks is to rob an **all-night** convenience store.

By chance and the needs of the script, in the store - browsing and **dreaming** through the celebrity mag racks - is Leila, a well brought up if **troubled** Muslim girl. Her culturally informed reticence has long since curdled into a silence that confirms to her an **invisibility** and irrelevance that she can only overcome through her secret life as an accomplished **self-harmer**.

Stag Lee (**John Shrimpton**), so-nicknamed because of his cherished baseball cap that bears a logo of a stag and Silent Leila (**Layla Estasy**) so-nicknamed for already mentioned reasons, go on the lam. With his **ill-gotten** cash they board a northbound train after she succumbs, with conscious amusement, to his (ir)resistible pick up line: "Are you comin' or are you comin'?"

Stag Lee is in search of his **father**, who walked out when he was a toddler but who - he **confidently** tells Silent Leila - owns a **Highland** estate and will welcome them. Leila, familiar with the fantasy world of **celebrity**, appears not to mind the unlikely story; and anyway, what else is there in her life? Reality and fantasy sharply **collide** when the urban kids from the tough side of town find themselves in another kind of tough place.

They encounter a vivid (and, for the audience, fascinating) **disconnect** between the heedless psychopathology of a modern **dead-end** city, with its casual violence and murder; and the traditional Highland life of **moneyed** lairds, deer stalking, virtually ritual and reverent **slaughter** and a relationship with animals that is as **alien** to the city kids as walking on the moon.

The play and production also offer further **enticing** disjunctures as the two are almost claimed by the Scottish wilds, with its **inclement** and punishing weather. They are persuaded by a mysterious **ghillie**, who finds them wandering, to thaw their frozen hands in the **life-saving** bloody warmth of the newly-slit open belly of a doe. At the same time, some of the play's most **poignantly** affecting moments are built around tentative **renditions** of A-Ha's "Take On Me", which is somehow even more incongruous and **shocking**.

The play's **style** is part narration, part observation, part **distanciation** and part clearly drawn and rich characterisation. It is blessed, in this production, with a uniformly excellent cast, the two younger actors being joined by **Kenneth Moraleda** in the unforgiving roles of the murdered boyfriend and also the ghillie, who is of course Stag Lee's long-lost father and not a rich **landowner** at all. The fourth element of the quartet is New Zealand star **Danielle Cormack** whose various roles culminate in a glorious reading of a celebrity whose sojourn in the Highlands is as **ridiculous** as Madonna's lady of the manor role in her English village.

Director **Susanna Dowling** brings everything to this play in her **choreographing** of its characters; and the everything is also blessedly **minimal**. The actors inhabit their roles with **conviction** and belong in the space as if planted there. Part of this may be because although they are dressed as you might imagine **everyday** contemporary Scottish folk might be dressed, they are **barefoot**. And there is something touching about the **vulnerability**, individuality and expressiveness of the human foot in these circumstances that is **mesmerising**.

white blackbird's **signature** style is movement and the choreography, by **Johanna Puglisi**, that underpins Dowling's work also highlights the **awkward** poetry of young adulthood with aching clarity. **And the whole is rendered clear and bright through Irma Calabrese's set and costumes** and **Teegan Lee's** lighting design. The other major creative input into the production is **Ekrem Mulayim's** sound design and composition that wash the simplicity of the staging in **dazzling** aural colour.

Yellow Moon is yet another **feather** in B Sharp's already well-plumed cap and **credit** for a great night's provocative entertainment has to go to white blackbird too. The company has brought an **exciting** new cast and creative team into Belvoir Street; and has also shown other companies - whether it's intended or not - how Australian theatre really should be and could be about **colour blind casting**.

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