



Atomic Oz Unravels



In October Atomic Oz will be exploding onto the streets of Brisbane with their unique fusion of street theatre and anti-nuclear activism. Their story began in Western Australia in 2000 when the Community Anti-Nuclear Network created and

staged Atomic Oz to unfold the history of Australia's involvement in the global nuclear industry. After a year of incubation Atomic Oz was reformulated, rewritten and revised by original scriptwriter Scott Ludlam for a three-month national tour that visits Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Canberra, appearing at festivals, university and school campuses, and prominent public spaces. The inspiring group left Perth on the 2nd of September to perform in the lead up to this years federal election. After a successful stint in Adelaide the troupe recently moved on to Melbourne and will perform on the 14th October at the West End Street Festival.

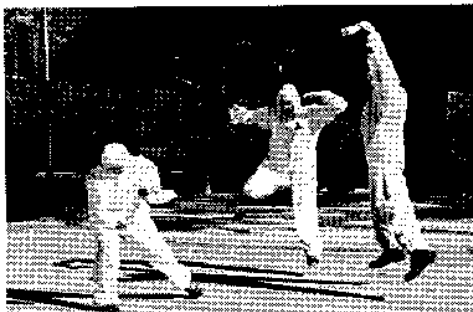
Played out on a giant map of Australia, the show travels from 1947 to 2001 in a circus sideshow of military, industry and Prime Ministerial figures doing their stuff with the assistance of the Public Relations aide and their pet monstrosity 'the Friendly Atom'. This 45 minute show, packed with comedy, song, dance routines and pyrotechnics, is about celebrating our community's desire for the 21st century to be nuclear free.

Audiences will time-travel from the British bomb testing at Maralinga and the Montebello Islands, the establishment of the research reactor at Sydney's Lucas Heights, through the uranium mining boom times and the Jabiluka blockade, to the arrival of the international waste dump masterminds - Pangea. Atomic Oz is the all singing, all juggling, very funny history of Australian mums, dads, grandparents, students, indigenous groups and unionists standing up and saying 'NO' to a future contaminated by nuclear waste.

The show answers these questions: How did we come to be Atomic Australia? Could things have been even worse today if there had been nobody protesting along the way? (The answer to this one is a resounding 'YES!' by the way.) Now, with a Federal election in view, it's time once more to make serious decisions about the future of our country and raise our voices, pens and barricades once again. Australia is poised at a nuclear crossroads.

Paul Hood, of Shenton Park, tour co-organiser and performer, said "The government supports the genocidal nuclear industry in Australia, so it is up to our community to stop this madness. Nuclear issues have not been prominent despite strong community opposition to uranium mining and nuclear waste dumps. In fact, the politicians are ignoring popular opinion, pushing ahead with more mines, maintaining our heavy involvement in the US National Missile Defence System and recently commissioning a new nuclear reactor."

He continued: "Only participatory democracy will end the political hypocrisy and this play will inspire and ignite community action, making the nuclear issue prominent in electorates across the country."



A benefit gig at the Gabba Hotel (Friday the 12th October) involving local bands, and a film night at the Paddington Worker's Club (Thursday the 11th October), screening the documentary film "Fight for Country" (Rockhopper Productions) and others, will be held while the troupe are in town.

Local groups in West End like ENUFF, Friends of the Earth, CHOGM Action Network and the Grass Roots Centre are lending their support to Atomic Oz.

The group is to be billeted out to households around West End for the duration of their stay. Brisbane co-ordinators are seeking local participants to aid in staging this national event. Musicians, actors, circus performers, billets, props and publicity are required as Atomic Oz is brought to fruition. Any suggestions and offers of help with the above performances and benefit gig should be directed toward the Brisbane co-ordinators Chris (Ph: 3720 8208) Lorna (Ph: 3359 7196)

Check out the website at <http://www.votenuclearfree.org/atomicoz/> and keep your eyes peeled for posters advertising dates and venues.

kill music and let sounds live

An exorcism of musical spirits by Jeffrey Erbacher, John Rodgers and Erkki Veltheim at QPAC's Merivale Street Studio, Saturday 22 Sept.

The atmosphere is dark, repressive, religious: votary candles; the scroll and fretwork of the heads of a collection of violins and cellos throwing shadowy crosses on the wall and scrim; voices intoning; the smell of frying bacon; random cracks of sound punctuating the otherwise sombre mood of the deliberately protracted prologue.

This is the haunting - a register of poltergeist activities which occurred in real life (including the phantom smell of cooking bacon) to a friend of the performers, Elliot Dalglish. The classical concert instruments downstage become a brooding grouping from Lorca's *The House of Bernada Alba*, evoking an aura of early Polanski rather than *The Exorcist*, Peter Straub rather than Stephen King. These instruments listen. The voluptuous gleaming of polished wood begins to exude paranoid delusions of grandeur, pride, and persecution.

Behind the scrim, there is the dimly seen presence of two concert performers (John Rodgers and Erkki Valtheim) who take turns to tend the sizzling bacon (souls burning in hell?), and read aloud from manuals of instruction for violinists. This litany of instructions imperceptibly builds up a picture (along the lines of Beckett or Peter Handke) of classical concert performers as victims of the bourgeois cultural regime that lionises them; and concert-going itself as an absurd ritual of bourgeois power.

The message is reinforced by slide projections of an 'aristocratic' virtuoso, Jascha Heifitz, juxtaposed with the self-consciously 'populist' image of Vanessa May playing her violin in a white bathing suit. Despite the latter attempt to popularise classical music, the indefatigably powerful iconic stature of the classical string instrument renders it utterly risible. How can these instruments be cleansed for contemporary expression - present a clean slate - except by a complete historical exorcism?

This is the second act of the piece: an act of class war, according to Erkki Valtheim. A ritual enactment of class war perhaps, because it is also diabolically funny. Funny as hell, in fact. The two po-faced exorcists perform energetically in frenetic silent film comedy style as they 'liberate' a lewd cacophony of sounds from their 'possessed' instruments, until finally the wailing of lost souls dies away into silence, and the instruments are literally 'laid to rest'.

As the lights come up in the auditorium, the performers declare that the instruments are now 'safe' to be handled and (innocently) played by the untutored members of the audience. The audience's relationship to the classical concert has been deconstructed, all barriers are down, and in a carnivalesque turnaround, what once was sacred has become profane, or democratised. ('But is it music?' I hear the philistines cry again.)

For all its riotous playing with such Barthian notions of intertextuality, does, can, this project succeed in and of itself? Of course not. But such destruction and silencing - a recourse into violence and terror, as Martin Buzacott has pointed out elsewhere - is perhaps the last resort in a world bereft of actual political change, a world where we are exhorted by Beckett to "fail again; fail again better."

A funny and bitter parable of our times that deserves to be festivalised.

Doug Leonard



Margret Roadknight to play at West End Street Festival Margret's returning from Paris soon and will play at the Festival on Stage 2 (opposite The Vault and Caffe Tempo). Then she'll continue her more intimate concerts at Emma's Bookshop on Sunday October 28th

West End Street
P<E>S|T|V@1
Sun Oct 14th
TICKET INFO
\$2.50 presold from Emma's Bookshop
132 Boundary St
\$5.00 on the day
KIDS FREE