

PLAYS AT PAXTONS

Paxtons on the river is the ideal venue for an evening's entertainment and, for this week only, that entertainment comes in the form of a delicious medley of one-act plays, courtesy of Kucom Theatre.

The program includes two ten-minute plays by Alex Broun (*A Pubic Hair by Johnny Depp*, and *A Difficult Birth*), both directed by Luana Royle; *The Bard on Trial*, written and directed by young local playwright Daniel O'Neill; *The Monkey's Paw*, an adaptation of the classic horror story by W.W. Jacobs, directed by Peter Rosier; and Helen Wyngard's *Garbage*, directed by Jim Kelly. For both Royle and O'Neill, this is their directing debut for Kucom.

There is something here for everyone, and some intriguing questions to be answered, such as: How much would you pay for a celebrity pubic hair? Did Shakespeare really hate the characters he created?

With a cast of ten actors to play 28 different characters, versatility is essential, and *The Bard on Trial* gives ample scope to Neal O'Leary as he portrays in rapid succession a volatile Italian-accented Julius Caesar, a romantic Romeo, Mark Antony (as a nerdy Woody Allen clone), Richard III (complete with hunchback) and a vengeful Macbeth.

Sally Howard also displays an impressive range - the brash celebrity-collecting Mimi (*A Pubic Hair by Johnny Depp*) re-emerges in later plays as an imperious Cleopatra, a gently concerned doctor, and finally the brooding, dark-clad figure of the Narrator in *The Monkey's Paw*. Written by W.W. Jacobs in 1902, *The Monkey's Paw* still has the power to chill after all these years, and Kelly Gregg's powerfully emotional performance as the bereaved mother is especially poignant.

Playwright Daniel O'Neill's memories of school Shakespeare studies are still fresh, and he puts them to good use in *The Bard on Trial* where a frustrated high school student summons the Bard to stand trial for mistreating his characters and audiences. A beleaguered Shakespeare (Brian O'Neill) droops despondently, Muppet-like, over the side of his witness box, inviting our sympathy as he attempts to fend off the wrath of his disgruntled characters.

The setting for the final play is garbage – literally! On a stage strewn with rubbish, three homeless people are faced with a dilemma when they find something unusual in the garbage. Here are three very fine performances from Carolyn Thompson, Jess Newman, and a nearly unrecognisable Peter Rosier wearing a three-day stubble and a pair of trousers so grotty you can almost smell them.

Plays at Paxtons provides an excellent opportunity for younger, less experienced actors to work with and benefit from the example of more seasoned performers such as Carolyn Thompson, Kelly Gregg and Bill Wall. Wall's grief for his estranged wife and unborn child in *A Difficult Birth* is palpable, and Thompson brings a touchingly gentle pathos to the role of Florrie in *Garbage*.

Plays at Paxtons is on this Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7.30pm. Book online at <http://www.trybooking.com/FYXR> OR <http://www.trybooking.com/104719>, or phone Kucom on 0408980022.