



One-man tour de force: Rick Lau

Short on time, long on talent

CABARET

The Brisbane Cabaret Festival
Brisbane Powerhouse, May 18-21

AS sodden patrons arrived on the opening night of the Brisbane Cabaret Festival, the question of whether cabaret is still a relevant art form was answered loudly, and in the affirmative. With rain and hail causing havoc across the city, anyone brave enough to fight their way to the Brisbane Powerhouse had to really want to be there and, for the most part, they weren't let down.

Proceedings kicked off in the Powerhouse Theatre (in table and chair cabaret mode) with the warm and accessible duo of Leah Cotterell and Carita Farrer and their tribute to Cole Porter. Six months pregnant, and with her hand on her stomach, Farrer's earth mother performance of *My Heart Belongs to Daddy* brought down the house.

But this moment of sensuality and showmanship was in stark contrast to what followed from the headlining Rhonda Burchmore. With her trademark shock of red hair, Burchmore presented her one-woman musical tribute to the loves of her life. While obviously programmed to attract the punters, it was cabaret by numbers. Strung together with short anecdotes, Burchmore rolled through the obvious (*Love is in the Air, Fever*) and, while she is technically proficient and doesn't lack energy, her performance was sadly pedestrian.

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On the second night, Paul Hankinson's *Montmorency and his Orchestra* played in the Powerhouse Theatre. How does one describe such an act? Camp, ethereal, visionary, completely insane, Hankinson (supported by his ghostly orchestra) had the audience spellbound with his consummate songwriting and vocals, climaxing with the whimsical *Ducks Don't Need Satellites*. A festival highlight.

Rick Lau's *How Now Rick Lau* was a one-man tour de force of musical self-analysis, exploring late-night internet addiction as well as being gay and Asian in a country that has a tendency to look down on both. Lau's energised vocals and razor-sharp wit had the audience stomping for more.

Meanwhile, downstairs in the bunker-like Visy, the audience was carried off by the faultless harmonies of Rosa Canina (Alison St Ledger, Leah Cotterell and Barb Fordham). They were followed by Mt Isa resident Megan Samardin, who entered the stage as if she'd just got off the school bus. Her unassuming presence proved deceptive; Samardin has a voice and stage presence beyond her years. She's someone to watch.

In fact the whole festival was something to watch, but playing for just three nights, it's hard not to come to the conclusion that it was simply way too short.

Shaun Charles



By numbers: Rhonda Burchmore

