

CLOSE PROXIMITY



AS PART OF THIS YEAR'S FRINGE WORLD AND THE BLUE ROOM THEATRE'S SUMMER NIGHTS PROGRAMME, PROXIMITY BRINGS AUDIENCE AND ARTIST VERY CLOSE TOGETHER. TROY MUTTON FINDS OUT MORE FROM CURATOR/ARTIST SARAH ROWBOTTAM.

Have you ever been to a play where you were the sole audience member for a show of one? Sarah Rowbottam, curator and participator in the Fringe World/Blue Room Theatre Summer Nights production *Proximity*, says the format has been around for some time, but this show "is Australia's first micro-festival solely dedicated to presenting one-on-one art," and accordingly, they "are really excited about its potential for shifting the way theatre is perceived here in WA and Australia at large."

The idea started with Rowbottam's co-curator James Berlyn (another performer), who along with provocateur Kelli McCluskey, had the vision to "create a platform for WA artists to make and present one-on-one art." The initial workshops produced a huge response, and in the end they whittled down 50 applications to the 12 performances you'll see each night during the festival.

"We wanted to create a programme that contained a mixture of theatre, dance, and live art," Rowbottam enthuses. "We looked for works which challenged the notion of the audience performer relationship and responded to the theme of proximity and intimacy in one-on-one performance in clever and rigorous ways. Some of the works are confronting and others are quite humorous and playful. You can play strip poker in the bar, experience a private tap dance to your favourite song, learn how to take a three-minute shower or go for a spin on a trike bike in the cultural centre."

It truly is a personal 12-minute session, for both artist and audience member. "Audiences enter a space alone and experience a performance made just for them. I think it's incredibly personal for both artist and audience. There is an inherent sense of honesty and authenticity in one-on-one work, which makes the artwork really unique and special... I think the artist is equally as nervous and excited as the

audience. You can never tell how an audience might react when they enter the space so artists need to be really perceptive and shift and shape their work to the individual. Proximity artists will perform their work 60 times to 60 different audience members."

When asked who to look out for, Rowbottam is humble and diplomatic in her answer, which makes sense, because the diversity on display really means there is something for everyone. "It's hard for me to shine a light on one particular work because they each have their own unique and curious quality. The festival as a whole is really exciting because performances are scattered throughout the entire building –the dressing room, bathroom, kitchen, theatre, office, bar and even the storeroom under the stairwell. In Hellen Russo's powerful dance work *Fragmentation 1.2* the audience becomes the lighting operator and in Jackson Eaton's work *Glory Hole Beard* you get to stroke a full-on beard in the male toilets." See? Something for everyone. Rowbottam's own performance culminates in a long-table Sunday dinner.

Rowbottam, along with co-curator Berlyn, is hoping to make *Proximity* an annual event, and with a bunch of the Fringe shows already sold out, the future looks bright, and she speaks glowingly of this year's festival. "Fringe and The Blue Room Theatre Summer Nights allows independent artists to get their works up and running, to take risks and test new ideas. It also brings some of the world's best artists over and creates an incredible buzz in the city which gets people excited about seeing art."

WHAT: Proximity

WHERE & WHEN: The Blue Room Theatre Sundays from 29 January to 19 February