

PROXIMITY

It Takes Two

Proximity takes over the Blue Room Theatre on Sunday, February 5; Sunday, February 12, and Sunday, February 19, at 3pm, 4pm and 5pm. Find out more at proximityfestival.com or blueroom.org.au.

Confronting, intimate and engaging, *Proximity* challenges both audience and performer in a micro-festival of one-on-one theatre works, set to take over the Blue Room Theatre as part of the *Summer Nights* program next month. A platform for performance in which the audience and the performer co-exist, *Proximity* is the brainchild of Sarah Rowbottam and James Berlyn, featuring 12 artists in 12 spaces with shows that last for 12 minutes each, 12 times a night.

"James Berlyn has been touring a one-on-one show called Tawdry Heartburn's *Manic Cures* and the idea for *Proximity* came from that," Rowbottam explains of the festival's conception. "James burst into my office and said 'I want to create a one-on-one festival' and I said 'I want to help you do that' and that's basically how it started. We brainstormed together and came up with the idea for *Proximity*. One-on-one festivals exist around the world already, just not here, there's one in the UK and there's one in America, so

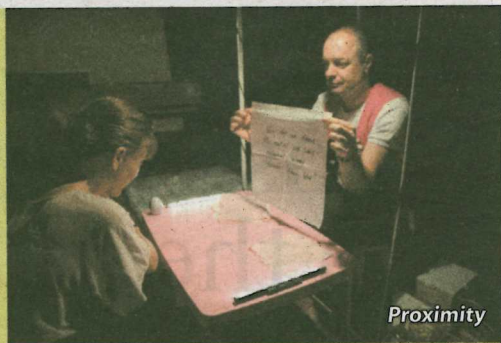
for us it's an opportunity to create an incubator for people who want to create one-on-one work and take them through a workshop and mentoring process."

As for the appeal of one-on-one theatre over the traditional format, Rowbottam says the relationship between audience and performer is key, with each performance varying slightly depending on the audience member's level of participation.

"The relationship between the audience and the performer are central to one-on-one work, so there's a really special exchange that can happen there. I'm not saying people can't be affected by normal theatre and dance shows but with one-on-one it's all about your engagement and communication with the audience. So each time the show is performed with a different audience member the show is going to be slightly different because the performer has to be really perceptive of the audience member and gauge their comfort levels and whether they are willing to participate or not. So every artist has to have a backup plan.

"It's confronting for the audience and the performer. Janet Carter is doing a show called *Flushed* and it's a one-on-one game of strip poker. She's constantly renegotiating how she feels about getting her clothes off for art in that situation."

Alongside Janet Carter playing strip poker, audience members can expect to encounter



Jen Jamieson having a three minute shower, Russya Connor telling a bedtime story and Sarah Nelson taking folks on a ride through the cultural centre in the afternoon sunlight.

"It can appear confronting from the outside but a lot of the works are really fun. The way we've shaped the program is that there are works that are confronting which are eased by works that are humorous or are a breath of fresh air. We purposely did that rather than clumping all the confronting works together and all the fun works together so that we can give an audience member an overall journey."

EMMA BERGMEIER

X-Press – First on the street, Wednesdays