

**KITE Arts
Education
Program at QPAC**

Boat

Director Wesley Enoch

Writer Janis Balodis

Designer Jonathon Oxlade

Lighting Designer David Walters

Sound Designer Brett Coltery

Lighting Designer David Walters

Teacher Artists Natasha Budd,
Adrienne Jones

Performer Steven Rooke

Age 3-8 years

Duration 45 minutes

All the best artists are young at heart, and regularly engage in the world of formless imagination which is rife in the early years of life. While many eventually abandon the warm world of daydreams and adventure, some choose never to leave. Only such rare souls could have possibly created Kite Arts production of *Boat*, which dives head first into the three year-old imagination with gleeful curiosity and emerges with this unique play.

This is an encore season for Kite's production of *Boat*, which was

originally performed in 2007. Back as part of the Out of the Box Brisbane Children's Theatre Festival produced by QPAC, the award-winning and veteran team includes writer Janis Balodis and Wesley Enoch directing. The show proved to be a particular favourite of the festival by children and adult viewers alike.

Boat is a simple tale. A young boy sets sail in his cardboard ship, fuelled only by his imagination. On his journey, the forever anonymous and insatiably curious child meets a handful of weird and wonderful creatures, making both friends and (temporary) enemies. He braves a wild storm before returning home to a dreaded dinner of broccoli. At 45 minutes, the play moves at a pleasant pace while still managing to achieve an epic sense of narrative.

Boat douses the audience in a mixture of Roald Dahl meets Dr. Seuss style of wacky, but cosily familiar sense of imagination. The lines between reality and a child's charmingly grand inner-world are very clearly created from the outset, thus allowing *Boat's* young audience to safely engage in a potentially scary universe.

The show plays with minimal but critical themes: a child's sense of imagination and reality, the most basic building blocks of human relationships, and a hero's journey. *Boat* has entirely age appropriate themes that the

desired audience (three to eight year olds) can easily comprehend.

The children's engagement is heightened by the fantastic placing of the audience inside a cosy studio, where the play's action operates in and around the audience at floor level. In most cases the temptation is too much for those sitting on the outer-edges. With awe children reach out to touch and carefully stroke the much admired large cardboard boat. To more cowardly artists, this brave audience design would suggest an invitation to chaos for the shows viewers, but not so for *Boat* whose story captures the audience so much that they do not seek to interrupt it, but be even more a part of it.

The seating design was not the only brave choice made by the show's production team. *Boat* offers no spoken dialogue, instead providing a very rare voice-over in only the most essential of interactions and thus, the show is intensely visual, offering spectacle at every turn. The prop and set design live up to the task; delivering moments of intelligent and creative puppetry, which, in keeping with the show's overall distinction between reality and fiction, goes to no great pains to hide the puppeteers. The young audience completely understands the action, and gasps in wonder at these moments of spectacle.

The interaction between this young boy and the rest of the mostly unseen cast is completely seamless, and the audience's eyes are manipulated with ease from scene to scene. The story moves in an almost episodic nature, the body of it revolving around the protagonist's interaction with an assortment of characters, climaxing in a rough storm. These interactions are charming, but occasionally leave wanting for more of a story.

The initial set up is only that of an adventure, and while the boy learns a few small lessons on his journey, there is no great resolution to the piece. In accordance with the play's overall themes, *Boat* feels less like a story so much as a state of play.

This doesn't bother younger audiences, of course, who seem to entirely understand what and who this story is about. Nor does it seem to bother the play. *Boat* doesn't ask you to look any further than what it presents. By no means does this make it a superficial performance, it is somehow a staggeringly simple universal one. In the imaginative landscape, *Boat* manages to capture something that eases you gently along into the adventure, in much the same way as that of the child's ship that steers the play itself. ☺

David Burton

