

Review: B.C.

By Chris Boyd

Herald Sun, Monday December 7, 2009

4 stars

The only problem with “do what you wanna do, be what you wanna be” as a way of life is that it assumes a base level of goodness and maturity. What if all you want to do is kill living things, eat fried chicken and add to your collection of dead birds, like Gabriel (Dylan Young)? Or have sex with your 15 year-old daughter, like the creepy Joachim (Tyler Coppin)?

There’s no moral compass in the world that Rita Kalnejais creates in her play *B.C.* Many of the adults -- and at least one of the children -- are emotional and ethical ‘retards’. The childless Elizabeth (Yesse Spence) can’t distinguish her desire to have a baby from her desire to have a boy sexually.

These godless people, unwittingly, are about to sire a messiah. And, boy, do they need one! Mary (*Rush*’s Nicole Da Silva) is knocked up by a birdman then falls for Giuseppe in trackie dacks (*Rush* co-star Ashley Zukerman). They don’t slouch towards Bethlehem, they wait for the bus.

Kalnejais’s plot is as messy and unruly -- and as adorable -- as real life. But there are great depths to her script.

Director Simon Stone writes that *B.C.* is a play about small moments of grace. It’s unclear if he’s aware that the matriarch in this play, Anne, the mother of Mary, takes her name from the Hebrew word for grace: Hannah. But I’m pretty sure the playwright would know.

She might be young -- *B.C.* is her first play -- but Kalnejais uses Christian (and Islamic) mythology in much the same way that Yeats used Greek mythology in his poem *Leda and the Swan*, in which the Queen of Sparta gets raped by Zeus disguised as a swan.

But in the space of half a lifetime, the stuff that we all knew -- as a culture, as a people -- is now arcane. And archaic. Known by few. A mystery to most.

I doubt, nowadays, that many hard-core Christians would know that Joachim and Anne were the grandparents of Jesus. Or that Elizabeth (Anne’s sister in the gospel, her niece in Islamic theology) and Mary fell pregnant at the same time. Nor, really, is that knowledge required to enjoy the play.

Bent as it is, *B.C.* is a touching and miraculous play. A 21st century mystery play. And Simon Stone’s production matches it, beat for beat, in genius, detail and barmy wide-eyed wonder.