

THE DEADBEAT OPERA

The Pump House, 544 Tuam St, Christchurch
06/09/2024 - 21/09/2024

Production Details



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Uniformly excellent performances deliver high-impact experience.

Review by [Lindsay Clark](#) 09th Sep 2024

Poor theatre at its best, as in this latest production from the talented crowd at work in Free Theatre, is a reminder how telling a barebones performance without extravagant technology and production support can be. Less, albeit very artful less, is high impact stuff.

There could hardly be a better place for it to happen than the old brick, unlined Pump House with band and playing spaces similarly unpretentious. Nothing fancy here. Support resources as needed – such as a microphone or the odd lighting source – are undisguised and honestly treated.

This, then, is the setting for a clever compilation of perennial ballads from Brecht and Weill and contemporary pieces commenting on the ways of our world, which is still open to the charge of greed and hypocrisy that fired up original audiences. As a rousing opening, 'The Ballad of Mac the Knife', delivered by Chris Carrow playing a beggar, brings out the goose bumps. That shark image never fails.

We are reminded that tonight is about comedy, which of course emphasises the nastiness of smiling at the bullying and deception we'll see in action through a string of punchy

songs. In case we miss the point, captions are unrolled. The human condition is relentlessly and compellingly revealed as Polly (Sarah Clare Judd), daughter of merciless beggar king Peachum (Aaron Boyce), hooks up with suave arch villain Macheath (Hester Ulllyart), setting up a whole trail of consequences.

Falkenberg's new collage of material treats some elements of the original lightly, but there is no shortage of tension as we are carried from song to song. The traditional pardoning of Macheath (in search of a tongue-in-cheek 'happy ending'), is freshly dealt with in a brilliant stroke which deserves no spoiler.

All this calls for absolute assurance and vocal agility to maintain the intensity of music and message. Performers and musicians are uniformly excellent, presented in stylishly tatty outfits which vividly underscore the theatricality of their doings.

Poor theatre maybe, but the experience is undeniably a rich one.

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