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[ONstage: Christchurch’s Ubu nights – the best thing about Fridays in the shaky city](#)



UBU will transport you to another place...

ANNABEL WILSON drops into the Arts Centre’s refurbished Old Gym for Free Theatre’s Ubu night.

Housed in the heart of old Christchurch, the [Free Theatre](#) is the vanguard of post-quake cool. The first arts organisation to return to the restored Arts Centre, the company have taken over The Gym where they produce experimental theatre (having just finished their successful season of [The Black Rider](#)), run an Education Programme, foster new works and host regular Friday night events.

Run in honour of the company’s patron saint Ubu, the evenings combine theatre, music, film and hospitality to curate a sensory experience for audiences. Performances spill from the tilted stage, into the crowd and through to the bar. A menu and drinks are styled to match the look and feel of the soiree. Each Ubu night is different. To date, they’ve held Casablanca, Punk, Faust, David Lynch, Brecht, Bowie, Frankenstein, Beat, Berlin Kabaret, Alice in Wonderland, Warhol, Kafka, Tango and Dada/Surrealist themed nights. I attended the Crossroads Ubu Night, part of [The Cavell Leitch New Zealand International Jazz & Blues Festival](#). Standing at the back of a full house, pinot noir in hand, I was soon met by performer George Parker, who led myself and my companion to seats at the front. “Come right this way,” our host boomed, his face a German Expressionist mask of blackened eyes and white makeup. We were swiftly transported to an askew world; a mash up of songs, spoken word, music and movement woven with a dark thread.

Through a crimson and blue haze, a band supports the performers who draw attendees into a liminal space that’s halfway between saloon and salon. Seated around wine barrels, dining on The Rolling Om’s seafood chowder and manuka smoked pork ribs or tofu with creamy polenta, the audience were treated to a spectacle that played with the ‘pataphysical’ possibilities of the Crossroads concept. The show embraced the sensation of being at the threshold, the in-between, a place where anything could happen. Swoony sax and piano underscore the entrancing acts. In a society perforated by “alternative facts”, the lyrics “it sounded like the truth but it wasn’t” felt particularly apt, and a useful analogy for the night. Everything is adroitly off-kilter, giving the crowd plenty of mind-fodder to discuss (or dream about) later. ‘Wish You Were Here’ was sung as a duet, distorted and intercut with spoken word riffing on love and loss. We

hear a monologue from a clingy co-dependent girlfriend infatuated with a muscular, paddle-boarding ‘Robert’. Elvis Costello’s ‘My Aim Is True’ is taken to a haunting new level. Convulsing corpses “heard the devil waiting outside your door”. A singer sprawled on the floor, declares “I’ll shoot the moon right out of the sky for you, baby!” Waxy figures emerge and disappear from a trapdoor. Dancers in outsize horned devil and heavy-lidded masks gyrate onstage. A Lover Man belts out a show tune for his femme fatale. And this is just the beginning... “Does the crossroads spook your head? It’s all downhill – turn back instead.”

If you’re after an antidote to the stream-lined nine to five, whisk yourself away to the Free Theatre’s next Ubu night. It’s my new favourite thing about Friday.

- ANNABEL WILSON

Proudly supported by The Arts Centre of Christchurch and Creative Communities, Free Theatre together with its hospitality partner The Rolling Om, collaborates with a diversity of artists to create spectacular experiences. Ubu’s Bar is stocked with the finest from Black Estate Wines and Cassels & Sons with an Ubu Special reflecting the experience of the night and to complement the Menu for the evening.

Entry is \$10 (door sales only), the bar is open from 6pm.

<https://www.facebook.com/FreeTheatre>
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