



Devilishly deft acts of mischief

THEATRE

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea
 By Suzanne Andrade
 1927
 The Playhouse
 Review: Pier Leach

English performance company 1927's oddball three-hander comic cabaret *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* delivers one of the most purely enjoyable, if slender, treats of the festival.

A 55-minute series of strange vignettes with a silent-movie era aesthetic, it unites performance, live piano (Lillian Henley) and grainy, monochrome projected animation — with which performers Suzanne Andrade and Esme Appleton quite beguilingly interact.

As the white-faced, poshly-accented narrator (Andrade) informs the audience, the 10 twisted tales derive from the space between "a rock and a hard place". They certainly have a delightfully macabre, absurdist edge — and none ends well.

The *Nine Deaths of Choo Choo Le Chat*, in which Appleton enacts the cat's series of unfortunate adventures, is the first of the amusingly gruesome affairs. It is wonderfully staged, with Appleton's precision performance integrated seamlessly with Paul Barritt's stylish animation.

Things only become more entertainingly bizarre as the grim nursery rhyme-like sketches tell evocative tales of homicidal gingerbread men, housewives who all end up with the clap and two

prim-looking neighbours driven to bloodshed over flower-growing.

One of the most sinister is the tale of two pinafore-clad sisters — the creepiest I can remember since the expressionless siblings in *The Shining* — who invite granny to play in the woods after their parents mysteriously die in a wishing-well mishap.

The four-strong company — in which Andrade writes and directs, Appleton designs the costumes, Barritt animates and co-directs, and Henley composes the lively 20s-inspired music — have honed each piece to perfection.

Within the construct of their wacky, 1920s and 30s-obsessed universe, they have created a unique, thoroughly charming little show with which they say they hope to "bedazzle and entertain audiences worldwide until they are either too old or too wise to carry on".

Bedazzle and entertain they do. It doesn't require a shred of brainpower — something for which, mid-week and mid-Festival, suits me just fine.

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea ends on Saturday



Stormy tales: Top stagecraft.