

## Australian Stage

### The New Electric Ballroom

PRINT EMAIL

Written by Sarah Wells

Wednesday, 18 February 2009



*The New Electric Ballroom* is a complicated affair. Part surreal, part self-reflexive, word-lyrical and just a little bit depressing, it is writer/ director **Enda Walsh's** story of three sisters trapped by their memories and perceptions of the pain of love.

*Clara* (**Ruth McCabe**) and *Breda* (**Rosaleen Linehan**) live in a tiny Irish fishing town, rarely if ever leaving the house, the two of them constantly reliving the stories of their first love and first heartache, both of which took place at the New Electric Ballroom. Their sister *Ada* (**Catherine Walsh**), having, it seems, grown up surrounded by their repeated misery has no experience of love at all.

Together the women rehash and replay the past down to the last rehearsed sentence, ritualistically and, it seems, as a penitence for the pain they feel, and have inadvertently caused each other in their young days. Indeed, it seems this is where their progress has stopped and as they stop-rewind-repeat cassette tapes of the old ballroom music, so too do their lives stop-rewind-repeat. Enter local fisherman *Patsy* (**Mikel Murfi**), another lovelorn and excommunicated soul who comes to the

house everyday to deliver a fresh catch and is everyday turned away from the conversation and left on the doorstep. Except this day, when he finally begs to be let inside and is finally accommodated...

**Sinéad McKenna's** stark, moody lighting and **Sabine Dargent's** fluorescent costume and innovative set work well to foreground the skewed fantasy of the piece. **Walsh's** vision itself is pretty dark here but filled with lovely imagery, and there is a quite successful blend of hilarity and despair.

The Irish accents are strong and **Walsh** works with this cadence to great advantage – if you can understand what's being said! The fast-talking action runs from go to woe and I have to admit, I found it a bit difficult to keep up at first. By the final scenes between *Ada* and *Patsy*, the play had my full attention, but I could have used more time to tune in to the intonations.

That being said, all of the performances were strong. **MCCabe** is a stand out as petulant child-woman *Clara*, while *Breda's* thwarted heart and motherly anger is well captured by **Linehan**, and **Catherine Walsh**, too, is on target as the repressed *Ada*. But it is **Mikel Murfi** who all but steals the show and is responsible for the most powerful scenes in the piece. I really missed him whenever he was off stage.

Overall, if you are ready for the energy and the language of *The New Electric Ballroom*, then the piece is worth seeing for its visual imagery and fine word-play.

### The New Electric Ballroom

*Part of the 2009 Perth International Arts Festival*

**Director** Enda Walsh

**Venue:** Playhouse Theatre

**When:** Tue 17–Sun 22 Feb, 7.30pm Tue 24 & Wed 25 Feb, 7.30pm Sun 22 Feb, 2pm

**Duration:** 1hr 20min no interval

**Prices:** A Reserve \$45/Friends \$40 B Reserve \$35/Conc \$30 C Reserve \$25

**Bookings:** 9484 1133 [perthfestival.com.au](http://perthfestival.com.au) Festival Info 6488 5555