

PERTH INTERNATIONAL ART FESTIVAL: Between the devil and the deep blue sea

By [Wally Graham](#) Arts Hub | Friday, February 27, 2009



Ironically it is the modern day technical components used in 1927's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* that takes the audience back to a time when simplicity was superbly entertaining.

What they manage to remind their audience of, so perfectly, is that simplicity still has the ability to be superbly entertaining.

The opening vignette of the performance, *The Nine Deaths of Choo Choo the Chat*, immediately transports the audience back to the cinemas of the 1930s.

Caught in the type of life threatening situations Pearl White would regularly escape from in *The Perils of Pauline* our protagonist is never as fortunate.

Choo Choo's regrettably fatal run of bad luck informs the audience that it is in for an evening of the macabre and twisted, and it is not let down from there until the cruel, empathy evoking finish.

The sexual and creative repression of the Victorian era is exploited perfectly throughout the performance.

Poetry that speaks of young babies suckling at suns that morph into breasts and of lesbian elephants cavorting in the sky.

A tale of young middle class Julie, who acts out a life of the poor for the pleasure of her neighbours, even to the point of burning a red light in her tree house.

All of which whisks the audience away on a journey back in time to poke fun at the terribly Victorian English way of disengaging from passion and reality.

The cleverness of 1927 is the naughtiness that is hidden within the text.

The delivery is, while not quite deadpan, slow and deliberate and allows the audience to find the laughs for themselves rather than be told there is a joke coming so it had best be prepared for it.

The subtlety permits each audience member to find what they find funny, which meant at times loud guffaws would emerge from different sections of the darkness at different times.

Nothing is more sinister than two young children, again middle class but in this case sisters, who speak in unison with perfectly formed vowels and so chillingly matter-of-factly about the demise of all their playmates and carers.

When it became obvious these two were looking for some assistance from the audience expectation was high as to what may happen.

If there was a low part to the night this was probably it. Keeping with the understated theme after going through the routine of dragging him up on stage, what 1927 used the audience member for then hardly seemed worth the effort when compared to the rest of the show.

In one of those, 'it seemed like a good idea at the time', moments the show is halted and loses its rhythm as they prepare their victim.

This is probably a hangover from their days performing in pubs and that is where it should stay unless it can be used to better effect.

However, having said that 1927 demonstrates audience participation at its best for the show's finale and the best part of it is that the audience doesn't fully understand that they have all become part of the show.

The entire performance is accompanied by a haunting, delicately played piano commentary, which is yet another tribute to the days of silent cinema.

The music imposes itself upon each tale but is never once intrusive yet it is such an integral part of the show.

The brilliance of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* is its brevity. A show like this is in danger when in the wrong hands. Obviously the time the company has spent honing this show has not been wasted.

The temptation exists to make some of the vignettes longer in order to push out the length of the show.

Thankfully 1927 remain true to their ideals and keep each part to its optimal duration.

Some are two minutes long, some are ten but all are perfect.

BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

When: 26 Feb–1 Mar: 7.30pm

3 Mar–7 Mar: 7.30pm

Where: The Festival Theatre