

## ADELAIDE FRINGE FESTIVAL,

**Warhol Bullet Karma @ The Cabinet Room at Treasury, Adelaide 21/2/2019**



**Fringe Review By Bob Becker**

**Date: February 23, 2019**

There is a line in **Warhol : Bullet Karma** written and played by Garry Roost, at Treasury 1860, where he recites Andy Warhol verbatim, “time is, time was;” and this encapsulates a feeling of cognitive dissonance that I had while watching a really strong actor performing a cleverly written play. I was in fact, in a state of cognitive dissonance for the entire performance – but maybe that’s how you are meant to feel when you have Warhol’s soul stripped bare in front of you.

The video promo for this play is very impressive –60’s pop style projections on Andy Warhol’s face with Roost saying, “I guess I could have been a nicer guy ... sure, I was tough on people in the Factory;” and this suggested to me that the “time was” that we would be thrust into would be 1960’s Midtown Manhattan and the infamous art space The Factory. What we got on opening night was a “time is” I didn’t expect – 1860’s Treasury with leather bound books, leather seats and portraits of uncomfortable treasurers and the Queen frowning down on the proceedings that were unfolding.

I don’t think the treasurers or the Queen would have liked Andy Warhol much; Valerie Solanas definitely didn’t like him. She was after all the crazed man hater from SCUM (Society For Cutting Up Men) who shot him, to give Andy Warhol “bullet karma” for being, in her opinion, an “arsehole”.

After you get over the dissonance that you are in the wrong space for a play about a pop art icon, and remind yourself that his iconic 1966 installation, *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* was presented at the Polish Community Centre in New York, and he did say after all, “Art is what you can get away with”, you settle into what is a really good play.

Written by Garry Roost in 2018 as a solo piece, **Warhol : Bullet Karma** is performed convincingly. This is more than an art history lesson; it is an insight into the mind of this tortured, brilliant artist and the crazy Valerie Solanas who shot him. Roost effortlessly switches between the various characters who inhabited Warhol’s space and mind. Using

glasses, feather boas and a command of accents we witness a seamless switch from the condescending opinionated British art icon, Francis Bacon to a fragile New York drag queen. This is a tough play for one actor. To get the full picture of Warhol the man, we are exposed to the people who influenced him – Lou Reed, Truman Capote, David Bowie, Edie Sedgwick. Capote has a great line in the play, calling Warhol a “sphinx without a secret”, which shows Warhol as a fragile man, a “tabula rasa” or empty vessel, willing to be filled by the greats who surrounded him.

The fragility and complexity and brilliance and arrogance and nastiness and gentleness and loneliness; the whole complex dissonance that was Andy Warhol is there in the script and powerfully presented by Roost. We get to see the poor migrant kid whose name was changed from Warhola to Warhol by accident, and the shot and dying Warhol who despite being obsessed with “fifteen minutes of fame”, doesn’t even realize he’s famous until a bystander calls out to the ambulance officer, “you’ve got to save this man, he’s a famous artist.” This is a really well written play with tension, foreshadowing and flash back to help resolve the dramatic intent of the play – did Warhol deserve the “bullet karma” for being in Solanas’ mind, “an asshole” for not taking her play and anti-male manifesto seriously?

The beauty of the scriptwriting and acting is that there is no judgement. We are given an insight, and then left to judge Andy Warhol and Valerie Solanas ourselves.

Garry Roost is a strong actor with real stage presence, a good sense of tempo and a commanding use of accent and vocal dynamics. This is a very convincing portrayal that goes so much deeper than an impersonation of the Warhol that we have seen in documentaries. Roost channels something so much deeper. Still not sure about the setting, but loved the script and the performance.