

Review: Opera incarnation of Snow White not the fairest of them all, thankfully



by Nathanael Cooper for BrisbaneTimes.com.au, 8 September 2016

Adapting fairytales is a fraught process, particularly when you are following Disney.

When most people think of Snow White they think of a raven-haired cartoon character singing to woodland creatures surrounded by a septet of dwarfs with unusual names.



Silvia Colloca as the mother in *Snow White*. *Photo: Dylan Evans*

Anyone who messes with that vision risks disappointing their audience or smashing up some childhood ideals.

Sometimes you take an axe to them and smash any pre-held conceptions to tiny little pieces.

That's what Lindy Hume has done with the *Snow White* opera currently playing at La Boite and, for the most part, she does it quite well.

While most would think of Snow White as being as pure as the driven snow, Hume's Snow White is a vixen, a seductress and leaves the audience with no doubt that little purity remains before the end of act one.

While most will think of the Huntsman as a noble man who saves Snow's life because she is so lovely, Hume's Huntsman is a sexually frustrated predator who only saves her life because of his own internal conflicts.

This *Snow White* is gritty and dirty and sexy and slightly salacious and it generally works really well.

Casting The Mirror as the villain of the piece, playing Snow White and her mother off against each other, is clever and fun and exciting, but casting him as a camp department store character with shades of Julian Clary and Frank N. Furter is lame and one-dimensional.

Regardless, Kanen Breen does a magnificent job of playing The Mirror and his voice is exquisite.

Silvia Colloca is extraordinary as the mother – her sexiness and vulnerability wrap around each other beautifully through the piece and she easily navigates the highs and lows her character is gifted.

Her eventual breakdown is a joy to watch and her character is the only one who has been gifted any decent arc to play with.

Stephanie Pickett's Snow White is interesting and exciting, her voice on the score is stunning and blends in a really interesting way with Colloca's for their duets. But while melodrama is common in opera, in such a small space with such a small cast her moments of heightened drama need to be reined in.

And that reining in is where this show really falls down. The piece is not opera, play or musical, but an interesting blend of all three and could probably have used a once-over from a director experienced in all three. Hume is an exquisite opera director, particularly on modern interpretations of the classical canon, but the nuance needed for a sung-through play is lacking.

Zulya Kamalova's music is mostly excellent. The tango performed by the mother and the mirror in act one is particularly memorable and the final song is a real ear worm; the particular set-up for the band – percussion, keys, cello and trombone – is oddly jarring but it seems intentional.

Suzie Miller's book borders on being purposefully provocative from time to time but she manages to tell the story succinctly and cleverly. Some of the rhyming is atrocious but that is often the case with English-language operas and can be forgiven.

This incarnation of *Snow White* is a perfect festival piece. Festival audiences tend to be more prepared to take risks and it gives the creatives an opportunity to put it before an audience then break it down and pull it apart. The work doesn't feel quite completed yet and more time in development will serve it well.