



Monster nothing but talk

Monster

Directed by Kevin Suttle
Starring Nathan Cuckow
Runs until 25 March
Roxy Theatre

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Violence is a paradox: as a society, we're horrified to hear about events like the Columbine shootings, yet we fail to understand what might motivate someone to do such a thing. Perhaps the millions of dollars put into violent entertainment like horror movies or third-person shooter video games have something to do with it?

Monster, a new play by the theatre collective Kill Your Television, aims at exploring this very contradiction, but while it presents the issue in an open and unbiased light, it fails to offer a clear opinion.

Monster follows a handful of characters, all portrayed by actor Nathan Cuckow. At the play's outset, a young man describes a gruesome killing of a man by his son. The interrelated stories of the other characters all somehow tie into this murder and its grisly details.

In order to portray how sensitive spectators can be to the entertainment they experience, *Monster* takes you through a spectrum of emotional reactions: fear, surprise, pity and anger. There are even some funny moments. Unfortunately, the numerous attempts to scare or shock the audience are gratuitous; one or two would have sufficed.

Right from the start, this play is unconventional. Cuckow doesn't begin his performance onstage. Instead, he begins his monologue as a member of the audience, and if you were sitting anywhere near him in the pitch-black darkness, his booming voice would be the last thing you'd expect to hear coming from somewhere beside you. However, his monologue can be a bit hard to follow and doesn't really make a point. He slowly makes his way on stage, where we're then introduced to the murder and to the theme of violence the play discusses.

It's clear that *Monster* challenges the audience to think, but the play does nothing more than reiterate the problem without offering any real insights.

Aside from re-enacting a murder, *Monster* describes or depicts characters who experience various forms of physical, emotional or verbal abuse. Kudos to the play for recognizing these actions, as well as depicting drug and alcohol abuse as a type of brutality that can be inflicted towards oneself.

However, the play doesn't delve far into the motivations behind these characters' cruel actions, and it does little to address why as a society we're

so enthralled with violence in movies, video games or the news. It's clear that *Monster* challenges the audience to think, but the play does nothing more than reiterate the problem without offering any real insights. While there's nothing wrong with presenting a question and challenging the audience, there's also nothing wrong with offering an opinion.

Furthermore, the play suggests that brutality in society can cause people to become abusive, but doesn't elaborate on the nature of this violence beyond what we see in movies or the news. If someone wants to blame society for being too cruel, that person must specify its many sources. But *Monster* points its finger only at the media, which really isn't fair.

Although the play explores the theme of violence from numerous perspectives, it also makes too many generalizations. While society itself has its abusive tendencies, not every individual engages in violent acts. As well, not everyone enjoys gruesome horror movies, video games or news stories. Unfortunately, the play doesn't explain why some people become violent and others don't.

The entire play takes a circular structure, presumably to mirror a chicken-or-the-egg relationship. This is an effective move, especially considering how the characters and subplots interrelate. But even though the characters' relationships mirror how everything is in one way or another connected, *Monster* provides few new insights into questions about violence and its cause.

Youth Group have finally rocketed out of obscurity by tickling the fancy of *The OC* faithful. While their revamp of Alphaville's 1984 slow dance standby "Forever Young" may be a saccharine beach-strolling romp for Mr Cohen and company, it may be the liveliest (albeit recycled) moment on an effort that ultimately falls flat.

Despite the guiding hand of producer and Death Cab For Cutie guitarist Chris Walla, *Casino Twilight Dogs* yields only a mash of regurgitated influences. Toby Martin's vocals drone on uneventfully through twelve lamentous tracks while making bizarre and unsuccessful strides to capture the lofty precision of The Shins' James Mercer or the twang of Isaac Brock. The arrangements are equally as boring, pushing little beyond a safe clamor of predictable timing and

the occasional touch of synth to drive home the heartache. If Youth Group have anything to redeem them from clockwork indie one-offs like "On A String" and "Catching & Killing," it's their talent for blending cool, clean guitars and warbly strings into tracks like "Sicily."

Apart from that, the lads of Newtown, Sydney have irked out a collection of dull, humdrum tunes that manage to make three minutes feel like eight. So while the boys of Death Cab are busy championing their young disciples for the sweet and dear and genuine sensibility of tracks like "Sorry," they'll also have to make time to shove its perilous similarity to Morrissey's "Suedehead" under the table. That's hardly anything to sweat over, however; most *OC* fans won't remember 1988.



Look at Ioan Gruffudd.

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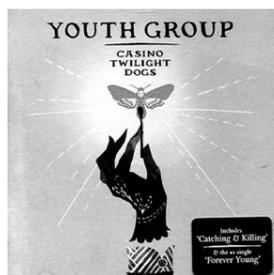
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MATT HUBERT
Arts & Entertainment Writer

After a string of EPs and two albums that garnered only moderate success in tight-knit indie circles, Australia's