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Crowning glory at the harvest time

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The Pineapple Queen

By Norman Price and Lisa O'Neill. LaBoite Theatre Company, Brisbane, JBookings: (07) 3007 8600. Until August 8. uly29. Tickets: \$33-\$39.

THE hard truths behind one woman's dreams are at the heart of *The Pineapple Queen*, a vehicle for Brisbane-based performer Lisa O'Neill. The play draws us into memories of the moment that O'Neill's unnamed character was crowned the Glasshouse District Pineapple Queen, the beautiful and talented ambassador for the Golden Circle Cannery.

On a deceptively simple-looking stage the *Pineapple Queen* remembers her moment in the spotlight, her much-loved mother who didn't live to see this long-imagined day and precious moments with her somewhat too fortuitously named new paramour, William Holden.

The *Pineapple Queen*'s enthusiasm for her mock-regal role brings humour to the play. However, the tenor of this humour shifts as hints of something darker seep into the dreamlike landscape of her memories. A loneliness haunts the *Pineapple Queen* at the height of her adulation and there is a looming sense of something more that is revealed only in the final moments.

While the plot of *The Pineapple Queen* focuses on family relationships, memory and identity familiar in Norman Price's writing, the collaboration with O'Neill brings polish, complexity and pathos to the piece that makes it a richer and more rewarding experience than *Kitchen Diva*, Price's previous play for La Boite.

If at times the *Pineapple Queen* seems like a little dancer in a music box, the intensity and precision of O'Neill's performance carries the play. O'Neill's highly physical personification of the *Pineapple Queen*, and her relationship with Michael Coughlan as Holden, translates into striking stage imagery.

Under Ian Lawson's direction, this imagery comes together with projections by Jen Jackson, lighting by David Walters and sound by Guy Webster to make the terrain of the *Pineapple Queen*'s increasingly unstable memories palpable.

For all its apparent simplicity, *The Pineapple Queen* is not a simple piece and, as the ways in which the *Pineapple Queen* represents the harvest in her home town become revealed, it is not always easy to watch. Ultimately, though, it is the self-deception of the protagonist in her desire to win the crown that gives *The Pineapple Queen* its power.

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