

Gala: Comedy That Celebrates Comedy

THE DIALOG THEATRE BLOG APRIL 4, 2017

As a part of the Melbourne University Comedy on Campus festival, the Comedy Gala was a fun and entertaining night featuring a number of acts, from student up-and-comers to established comedians.

Just the sheer diversity in all the acts was itself the strongest element of the show. The performers displayed a number of different comedic styles. All acts throughout the night were stand-up, with the exception of the Mudcrabs, who offered a variety of sketches. Even amongst the stand-up comedians, a range of different styles was presented, from observational to character-based comedy.

The Gala worked as a way of showcasing some local comedy talent. Lauren Bok, of SBS Comedy, was M.C. for the evening, and she did a great job of it. Her energy and enthusiasm was perfect for getting the crowd warmed up before she introduced each act.

The first stand-up comedy came from Hiew Wei Jie, and there was nothing held back, nothing safe from offence, in his brutal but hilarious act. The discourteous comedian was able to throw an insult at just about everything and everyone that nobody is allowed to insult. I really appreciated his no holds barred approach, because, after all, comedy is all about making fun of the things you usually can't. In short, he understood comedy, and he nailed it.

Next up were the Mudcrabs, to get a few skits in. As always, the group's performances were top notch, a difficult task considering how quickly they cycled through vastly different scenes and characters. I must admit that they were a little hit and miss with the laughs, such misses including a particularly long and somewhat clichéd news reading segment. When they hit, though, they hit with a ton of laughs that made their act a great addition to the gala. Highlights included a little song about moving mum-in-law into a retirement village, as well as bending the rules at the supermarket checkout.

Sean Morgan came on next to prove that awful poetry makes great comedy. What was so impressive was not as much what he was saying, but just how he was saying it. Through standing so awkwardly close to the mic, and pulling all these funny little facial expressions, he created a character that he was just so dedicated to throughout his entire performance. It's a hard thing to keep that level of focus; it's a harder thing still to make it look so natural. With just a shy little voice and a little book of poems, he had everyone in stitches.

Going with the theme of character comedy, Darcy Fleming brought to the stage the crooked eyeglasses and exaggerated Aussie accent of a hipster-hating hot dog fanatic. Looking back on it, I realised that his whole act was based entirely around just one joke, concerning aforementioned hot dogs. Of course, it was filled with innuendos, social commentary, and some more hipster-bashing, but it was all about the hot dogs. It was a great example of how to do a one-joke gig without it ever getting old. Again, commitment to character also played a big role here, and brought in a great many chuckles.

The last student act of the night came from Marlies Iserlohe, who I believe was the newest to comedy out of everyone there. Unfortunately, she was a little overshadowed by some of the more professional acts surrounding her. Even then, she still held her share of laughs, and wasn't the least bit phased by a tough crowd, still maintaining great charisma. Going back to a more well known, anecdotal style of stand-up comedy, she talked about the struggles associated with trying to get discount UberEATS. I guess there was a real food theme going on throughout the evening.

To close off the night, Andrew McClelland burst onto the stage in one roaring hell of a finale. McClelland was a much more experienced comedian, and that's not an insult to the other acts. Everyone was funny, after all, but McClelland had charisma enough to steal the show right at the end. He was recipient of the 2004 Piece of Wood award. I have NO IDEA what that is, I just know he probably deserved it. With topics varying from French bogan hairdressers in Horsham (rather specific) to Australian patriotism, he was a real crowd favourite. He held my attention for absolutely every moment I wasn't thinking about free sushi after the show.

As Lauren Bok said during the show, every comedian there was going places, and I totally agree. There was some real talent being displayed, and I hope that they will all be successful in their comedic pursuits. I don't think Andrew McClelland really needs my praise, though. After all, he's already got a Piece of Wood award!

Jack Nurzinski

UMSU's Comedy on Campus: Gala was performed on March 30 at the Guild Theatre, as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival