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This House Is Mine review: Revealing the fragility of mind and home

March 15, 2015

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Jason Blake

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Matthias Nudel, just one among Milk Crate's impressive ensemble. Photo: Patrick Boland

Reviewer rating:

**This House Is Mine****Eternity Playhouse, March 13**

Written by Maree Freeman with the real-life input of the Milk Crate Theatre ensemble, *This House Is Mine* explores the complex interplay of psychological illness and homelessness. At a time when notions of "house" and "home" are subsumed by a mania for "property", *This House Is Mine* asks us to think about how crucial and fragile a sense of place and belonging can be.

The show twists its narrative strands together effectively, beginning with a dramatic still life and a fraught telephone conversation. This is our introduction to Jason (Matthias Nudel) and Evelyn (Veronica Flynn), both of whom will play roles in the lives of other characters we encounter: Frank (John McDonnell), a psychiatrist experiencing the onset of dementia; Clem (Fabiola Meza), abused wife of Mack (Chris Barwick), and mother to estranged daughter Brooke (Rach Williams). Contessa Treffone plays Anna, Brooke's girlfriend, who is exhibiting symptoms of schizophrenia.

Between scenes, a small TV set lights up with the talking heads of the wider Milk Crate ensemble, who share their stories, diagnoses, world views and hopes.

Director Paige Rattray's production is elegantly spare, unfolds smoothly and is strikingly well performed. With the exception of the NIDA-trained Treffone, the Milk Crate players are unschooled, but all are expressive and convincing. Flynn is great to watch throughout and she makes the show's coda a wrenching one. The shock-headed McDonnell is excellent as the

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mentally disintegrating doctor, pitiable yet dignified.

Video artist Sarah Emery and video design consultant Sean Bacon's projections add motion and colour to what might otherwise be static scenes and give us a sense of these characters' inner turmoil. Crucially, they do so without dominating the frame or overwhelming delicate on-stage action.

Of the Milk Crate shows I've seen (2012's cabaret-like *Fearless*, and 2010's suburb-spanning promenade performance *Intersection*), this is the slickest (in the positive sense of the word) and the most polished. Even so, it bears all the hallmarks of those earlier shows: authenticity, honesty and generosity of spirit.

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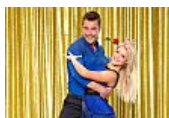
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