



THE SCOTSMAN

Cabaret and Variety review: Hot Brown Honey

From the start, Australian performers have been at the heart of the UK's 21st-century cabaret boom "though you wouldn't always know their nationality from their work.

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By The Newsroom

Rating: *****

Venue: Assembly Roxy (Venue 139)

Over the past few years, however, some of the most extraordinary Fringe cabaret has taken the form of Antipodean shows fusing social and political engagement, especially around First Nations identity, dazzling formal variety and raucous fun.

First came boylesque troupe Briefs. Last year brought the Kiwi drag--drama variety show K'rd Strip: A Place to Stand. This year brings possibly the wildest ride of all: Australasian collective Hot Brown Honey, including Ofa Fotu, Matehaere Hope "Hope One" Haami, Juanita Duncan, Crystal Stacey, host Busty Beatz and director Lisa Fa'alafi.

Things get off to a buzzy start as you enter the theatre, thanks to chatty welcomes from the performers, who are all women of colour. Then your eyes go to a striking honeycomb structure on stage that turns out to be the apparatus for a spectacular running light show. But it's what happens in front of those lights that counts: a pacy, rousing, high-octane cavalcade of comedy, dance, hip hop, beatbox and burlesque, delivered with passion,

style, laughter, inventiveness and a searing political message rooted in lived experience and the need to connect.

From atop the honeycomb, Busty Beatz charismatically oversees the proceedings, in which strong variety skills convey takedowns of sexism, racism, imperialism and more. A pneumatic hula hoop act skewers obnoxious tourist behaviour; an exotic Polynesian maiden turns out to have her own ideas about looking good in woven grass; infectious hip hop numbers lay down truths about microaggressions, privilege and the urgency of action.

Two numbers stand out for their inscription of progressive politics into traditional variety forms: Stacey's graceful aerial-strap act conveying the vulnerability and isolation of domestic violence; and Duncan's fierce yet elegant burlesque routine in which it's impossible to cheer the strip without also cheering decolonialisation.

It's phenomenal – sexy, foot-stomping fun and radical consciousness-raising all at the same time. As Busty Beatz boldly declares, “fighting the power never tasted so sweet”.

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