

Doodsnikke dysfunction

In Janice Honeyman's director's note in the programme, she uses a lot of exclamation marks. Doodsnikke is! that! good!

 By [Jana van Heerden](#) 17 Apr 2012



Doodsnikke is a dramatic adaptation of Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*, which won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama 1979. This South African version - the story of a dysfunctional Northern Cape farming family and their heartbreaking secret - is sure to win some prizes of its own.

The Baxter Flipside is a relatively small venue, providing an intimate space where the audience is drawn in to the sordid lives of the characters and the multiple levels of the reality they have created. You literally get to walk in the characters' shoes by walking through the set to your seat. It is dusty and barren - just a sand-covered stage and dilapidated old furniture - and you don't need to be from a farm to know from the outset that there is something seriously wrong. The story is brought to life by the details from the dust that hangs the air, to the moisture in Vince and Tilden's hair when they come in from the rain and the smell of Dodge and Hannie lighting their respective cigarettes.

Young Vince (Travis Snyders) and his girlfriend Shelly (Thenjiwe Stemela) are greeted by chaos and confusion when they return to his grandparents' rundown farm home in an effort to reconnect with his estranged family, who don't seem to (want to) remember him. His every effort at trying to connect with his clearly dysfunctional relatives fades into the background as clues of a terrible family secret, too despicable even to mention, come to light.

A journey of intrigue, shock and confusion

The audience is taken on a journey of intrigue, shock, confusion and, at times, humour as it becomes clear how this secret has adversely affected each character's life, even though they seem to think that the pretences that they are keeping up are perfectly normal. It is, however, clear to Shelly that the family is coming apart at the seams and, as an outsider, she prompts the revealing of the buried truth.

The disintegration of a typical white Afrikaans family, set as it is against a backdrop of disillusionment and breakdown of traditional family values, is brilliantly depicted by a wonderfully talented cast. Anna-Mart van der Merwe as Hannie and Gys de Villiers as Dodge are particularly moving and, between them, they keep the audience hanging on their every word.

Although the script flits between Afrikaans and English, subtitles provide translations in both cases and it works so well in the South African context that you can't imagine it being a translation. This is a challenging and highly impressive work of art produced and performed by some of South Africa's theatre royalty. For a

discerning theatre lover - not just those who enjoy Sam Shepard's work - this is a must-see. Along with the set and first-rate acting, Doodsnikke is bound to be the belle of the ball at the Fleur Du Cap and Naledi Theatre Awards.

Doodsnikke runs at the Baxter Theatre (Flipside) until 5 May, 2012.

www.baxter.co.za

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