

British Theatre Guide

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Puppetry of the Penis

Written and devised by David Friend and Simon Morley
Regent Theatre, Ipswich
(2003)

You've got to hand it to the Aussies. With *Tap Dogs* they took tap dancing out of the ballroom and onto the building site, making it more testosterone-charged than even the great Gene Kelly. Now *Puppetry of the Penis*, with typical down-under topsy-turvy, has managed to turn full-frontal male nudity and genital manipulation into a theatrical event that is alarming but charming, wild but witty, manic and ironic - but never salacious.

As the puppeteers' performance only lasts for just over an hour, the evening begins with 25 minutes of stand-up from Hattie Hayridge, to 'stretch it out a bit, make it longer for you'. Her laid-back delivery to a capacity audience of eager females clearly determined to have a good time was particularly brave, and she sent us off to our interval drinks in good humour even though we'd all been expecting the origami to be in full swing by now.

This was evidently a very different audience from those the guys have played to in Edinburgh, consisting as it did of women of all ages and a few bemused chaps along for the ride. But when at last the lights dimmed and the caped crusaders jogged onto the stage, it was enthusiasm rather than hysteria that greeted them.

Before they 'introduce us to the stars of the show', the guys establish a cheeky rapport between themselves, and also with the audience, assuring those at the back that the huge screen behind them on the stage will show their 'installations' to magnificent effect.

And they're not wrong. With playful relish, the boys start folding their phalluses, turning their willies into windsurfers, their dicks into hot-dogs, their logs into frogs, their beef bayonets into burgers and their one-eyed trouser snakes into slowly emerging dormice. The animal shapes familiar from Japanese origami are here, but the Australian art these lads have pioneered extends the range to include landmarks such as Ayer's Rock and the Eiffel Tower, as well as an astonishing fruit bat, achieved with audience participation, and a fan-assisted moving windsurfer as a grand finale.

This show has been a sellout sensation across several continents because of the guys' clever manipulation of their material. The UK tour has included venues as diverse as the Grand Opera House, Belfast and the Arts Centre in the small New Forest town of New Milton, where the audience's blue rinses will have been infinitely bluer than anything on the stage. This is a million miles from the strip-joint slick of the Chippendales; more a vaudeville act or an interlude of slapstick panto, with the pair alternately praising, ribbing and cajoling each other with laddish good humour.

What intrigues and entertains is the way they've turned a boys' bedroom prank into a theatrical extravaganza, celebrating with tongue-in-cheek innocence the flexibility of the phallus. Compared to what's readily available on our screens every night of the week, this is a show suitable for all the family: no sex, no violence - just daft, original fun.

"Puppetry of the Penis" is on tour until 30 November

Reviewer: [Jill Sharp](#)