

What The Critics Say

Dorian Gray Naked

A flamboyant, gripping and compelling production in which Oscar Wilde's fictional character confronts his creator in a fractured afterlife. Lush and enticing, yet simultaneously darkly disturbing. From the moment the handsome Blake Appelqvist as Dorian makes his spectacular entrance, he has the audience eating out of his hand. Appelqvist is flamboyant, seductive, wittily ironic at times and very moving – it's a magnificent performance. Condack on piano – who at times acts as an alter-ego to Appelqvist, at other times making eerie interruptions or witty comments – is splendid. They have a couple of terrific duets together. Condack's score is a mix of Gilbert and Sullivan, Broadway, wonderful ballads, Sondheim and smoky jazz while Morrow's libretto is vibrant and witty, sprinkled with Wildean aphorisms but also revealing the pain behind Dorian's existence. The hidden, underground life of Dorian's (and Wilde's) gay London at the time is evoked. The show examines Wilde's tragic downfall and how this affects Dorian. How will it all end? The answer: startlingly and dramatically.

Lynne Lancaster, Sydney Arts Hub

The writer and director Melvyn Morrow has put together a deep explanation of who Dorian Gray is, using witty and penetrating language in script and lyric form. This intelligent soliloquy really belongs to Blake Appelqvist in the role of Dorian Gray. With a commanding stage presence, cheeky expressions and mannerisms, and an appealing singing voice, Blake really breathes personality into Dorian.

Also crucial to the success of this production is Dion Condack. He is ever-present on stage with his piano and is the alter-ego for Dorian to reinforce his warped view of life. Dion has composed 20 songs throughout the play, mostly sung by Blake in his own unmistakable style. Notable were Party, Fathers and Sons and Forever.

There is plenty of colour in the show, with often elaborate, 19th century garments, both before and after disrobing! It is never dull in its 75-minute duration, with a cabaret-style feel, ideal for the intimate Limelight on Oxford theatre setting.

In this age of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, Dorian Gray Naked is a timely opportunity to reflect on the rise of narcissism and the peril which

may await those seeking unbridled pleasure. It is a clever piece of theatre, professionally orchestrated. Be quick to see!

Paul Kiely, Absolute Theatre

Dion Condack's music is scintillating. Appelqvist gives a knockout, sensual and brave 'star is born' performance. Must be seen.

Les Solomon

A puzzlement worth wrestling with, particularly as the hero of this conversation is owned by a devastatingly handsome and intelligent performer, Blake Appelqvist. He has an ascetic presence that Oscar may have admired and certainly an accompanying grace of movement, that in the limiting cabaret space on the second floor of this new venues LIMELIGHT, strikes one with its physical beauty that tantalises with its swift changes from the high camp to the glorious natural (Choreographer, Nathan Mark Wright). He has, as well, a secure and beautiful range of voice and an ability to deliver the words with impinging clarity. The Musical Composition is by Dion Condack, who also performs at the piano and verbally sings as an alter ego to Dorian. The score has its charms: PARTY, POSING, EROTMANIA. The Director Melvyn Morrow with his two co-creators/artists are sure of their material and has guided it with a convicted belief in its moment to moment communication.

Kevin Jackson

A clever new meta-musical. Morrow's reimagining of Dorian locks on to this virility and mines it for the large part of this production, hyper-sexualising the character as someone up for anything at anytime. The complexity of his analysis of his sense of self is compelling. Appelqvist is a cheeky, lively, and sometimes pouty Dorian. His vocal skill is phenomenal and added a solidity to the lyrics of this new musical. His trajectory of Dorian from centred, confident flirt to a scattered and unravelling man-boy was convincing in its fragility. As a new musical, the book and lyrics were clever and engaging with regular gems of literary puns or references. Similarly, Condack's music was original and unusual but has the makings of a special addition to Australia's musical canon.

Night Writes

Oscar Wilde would have loved this latest offering from Popinjay Productions playing at the Limelight Theatre in Oxford Street. Choreographer Nathan Mark Wright, assisted by Danielle Evrat, has performed a miracle in devising dance movements. Under the direction of Melvyn Morrow, Appelqvist sings, dances and changes into and out of a dazzling array of costumes dreamt up by Peter Henson, while sharing Wilde's witticisms at a furious pace. The timing is perfect with Mardi Gras around the corner, as the talented and beautiful Appelqvist prances around the stage playing Morrow's sensuous, erotic and very naughty creation in a double hander for gay theatre.

Irena Dunn, Altmedia

A clever exploration of an idea – what if Dorian Gray, the young man dreamt up by Oscar Wilde, was real? What would his back story be? A highlight was the sparkling music of composer Dion Condack. Appelqvist managed the smorgasbord of musical ideas with aplomb. It was a playful and entertaining evening.

David Spicer, Stage Whispers

A fictional character provides the inside scoop on his author Oscar Wilde. Imaginative and appropriately flamboyant, Morrow waxes lyrical about what might have been. Blake Appelqvist fills the room effortlessly. *Dorian Gray Naked* is thorough with its reinventions and fabrications. A cerebral experience.

Suzy Go See

Clever witty songs and delightful banter, expertly directed by Melvyn Morrow. Vividly and hugely entertainingly recounting the stylish and flamboyant life of Oscar Wilde and his fictional alter-ego Dorian Gray. Constantly delivers intense enjoyment. Recommended.

Lynne Belvedere, Sydney Arts Guide

As with Dorian Gray, the only way to purity involves a complete death of that which destroys. It is this circular aspect of Oscar Wilde that Librettist Melvyn Morrow understands and successfully represents in the outstanding production *Dorian Gray Naked*. A theatrically and intellectually rich effort, *Dorian Gray Naked* is one of those impossibly rare moments in theatre when all elements come together to make a truly perfect whole. Limelight on Oxford have moved this clever production to the middle room, and re-vamped a

sophisticated version of the space's predecessor, creating a sexy bar vibe for a sumptuous show. Lighting design by Mehran Mortezei benefits from clever beats that enhance with gradation and subtlety. Choreographer Nathan Mark Wright relishes the cabaret style space to feed thrilling movement to the cast. Peter Henson is a marvelous costume talent, creating enviable imagery that hops back and forth through time. Outstanding however, is the collaborative work between Melvyn Morrow, Musical Director Dion Condack and Blake Appelqvist as their Dorian. Blake Appelqvist presents with remarkable clarity the puppet that makes its creator. It is in his obedient break with his own creators that we come to terms with the possibility of a break with reason. His is a beautiful performance, poetic and lithe but equally impossible to pin down – even in words. Applause equally goes to Dion Condack whose music brings the enormity of Melvyn Morrow's words to our hearts and creates accessibility for a possible absence of reason. The audience will be brought to tears by the beauty of music such as Father and Sons (a stunning rumination on the death of god – among other things) and romanced by Erotomania and Being God among others. Dion Condack and Blake Appelqvist work comfortably with the circular nature of creator and creation, sharing the stage and playing the creative energy back and forth between them. They work as well together as Condack and Morrow are in synch. It makes for a deep and cohesive theatrical experience that inspires the audience in their own lofty thoughts. I see a lot of theater in Sydney and I am always glad to have ventured out of my cozy home to do so. But every so often something reaches a little deeper. Dorian Gray Naked is a sublime example of philosophy and art in harmony (like Oscar Wilde himself) and an exquisite evocation of creative potency.

Lisa Thatcher Theatre Review