

Joyride with the Toyota concerto

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Concave City

Dead Horse Productions. The Meat Market, Melbourne, February 11.

IT'S not every day that you go to a concert featuring a concerto for two Toyota Cressidas and a string orchestra.

But that's just the sort of thing to expect from Dead Horse Productions, whose stated aim is to promote new Australian compositions and to "dismantle preconceptions about what constitutes a performance".

They certainly do that.

Founded by Australian composer Kate Neal in 2003, Dead Horse is a long way from the aesthetic posturing of high modernist music, where elegant posers dress in black and vince with cerebral overload. This is about ideas, sure, but it's also about entertainment, and it acknowledges rather than alienates the audience.

Having said that, this gig at the newly redeveloped Meat Market relied on traditional static seating rows, the avoidance of which had been a hallmark of earlier Dead Horse productions.

The two Cressidas made their appearance in the premiere of Neal's work *Concave City & A Love Story for Two Cars*.

The cars rolled on to the cobblestones of the Meat Market's central concourse and, with the aid of two dancers, Lina Limosani and "Anton", began blinking their lights and slamming their doors, accompanied by a string orchestra with some of Melbourne's finest freelance musicians.

The dancers alternated between lissom playfulness and body-slammng the bonnets and roofs, before being consumed in the boot of one of the cars in a burst of white light, like a scene from *Repo Man*. All this was terrific, but overall the spectacle tended to overshadow the hard work of the musicians.

Away from the cars, there was still plenty to enjoy on the program. Brett Dean's *Studentest* proved yet again what an accomplished composer he is, while another work by Neal, *Dead Horse I*, skilfully blended the sonarities of strings, piano and a rhythm section of guitar, bass and drums. This work is densely notated, but the players made it sound like an inspired jam session, full of breath and life.

Among other works presented, Anthony Pateras's *Fragments*, *Splinters*, *Shards* created some great sonic cadences but needed more structure and outstayed its welcome, while the performers in *Wally Gunn's* moody piece *The Hive* would have benefited from some innovative mise en scene, and needed a few bee stings to liven up their act.

The brilliant tragicomic film *Pong* by Dutch composer Amoud Noordegraaf added depth to the evening, bringing yet another point of discussion to a thoughtful and rewarding program.

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