

## **Youthful quandaries**

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**By James Harper**

**SAMSON by Julia-Rose Lewis**

Julia-Rose Lewis says that she was tempted to include "every single remarkable or unusual thought I'd ever had about the universe" in her first play, *Samson*, co-produced by La Boite and Belvoir and having its debut at Brisbane's Roundhouse Theatre.

The playwright has pared back her initial compulsion to shoehorn life, the universe and everything into her play, resulting in a concise and disciplined piece.

Three young people, Essie, Beth and Sid, adrift and alienated in their country town, mourn the loss of their friend Samson, who has been killed in a mundane, pointless accident.

Along comes Rabbit, a younger newcomer, bearing scars of his own recent tragedy. He forms a friendship with Essie, but the others treat him with hostility. *Samson* tips its hat to all the depressingly familiar themes of contemporary theatre about young people: dysfunctional parenting, sexual confusion, violence, volatile relationships, grief and loss.

It also explores one less usual element, the influence of fundamentalist religion.

Despite their rough-and-tumble lives, the kids are part of a devout churchgoing community and have to wrestle with the fact, faced with the big questions, they find they don't really believe in the nostrums their church -prescribes.

Plus, inevitably, *Samson* had "a secret" (you can guess what) that he was struggling with and that his bereaved friends and family don't want to know about.

Ethnicity is the one social issue never directly referred to in the script. I don't know if it was the playwright's conception or simply a result of casting the best available performers, but the cast's obvious diversity - one Anglo, one Chinese, one African, one Aboriginal - adds further layers to the standard scenario of alienated young people in a country town.

Lewis succeeds in implying complexity without letting things get too unwieldy, maintaining a focus on the core theme of friendship tested by grief.

At times the production balances precariously between its aspiration to realism and a youth-theatre-by-numbers feel.

The actors playing the three older kids, Ashleigh Cummings, Belinda Jombwe and Charles Wu, affect a rapid-fire "actors trying to sound like bogans" delivery, which means that much of the dialogue is indistinct and the audience is left groping for crucial information. As Rabbit, Benjamin Creek struggles with diction as much as the others, but his physical expressiveness is striking.

He can convey volumes about uncertainty, yearning and hope simply with a sideways glance,

a shrug or a smile. Tickets: \$35-\$59. Bookings: (07) 3007 8600 and online. Duration: 80min.  
Until May 2. Then Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, May 7 to 31.