

# Frontrunners from the fringe festival

THE FRINGE FESTIVAL  
Highlights of the Women's  
and new short works  
seasons  
Report: CHRIS BOYD

## THEATRE

LINE honours in this year's Women's Season are shared by Margaret Dobson and Chasing Spaces, for *The Whole Shebang* and *Voices from the Bottle* respectively. The two pieces, which featured in the second week, are outstanding examples of the kind of work that the Women's Season fosters.

Margaret Dobson doesn't put herself on the line, she sprawls on it! A complete itemisation of things in her show reads: Margaret Dobson, a black leotard, a wristwatch and

a single piece of chalk. So, when she tells us that she is changing the underwear of her psyche, we can actually see that she has discarded the old but has not yet donned the new!

Madonna, she tells us, is her guru. So, she takes songs by Ms Ciccone and adapts them into feminist anthems. Thus *Vogue* becomes "rogue" and *Like a Virgin* becomes "I'm emerging -tough for the very first time..." But Dobson has a subtly ironic intent. *The Whole Shebang* is about emotional tenacity, body type and self-acceptance. It's sly, it's courageous, it's delir-

iously funny and it's shrewdly subversive.

If *The Whole Shebang* rates as "feminist" on the feminine-feminist-female scale, then *Voices from the Bottle* is firmly down the "female" end. Five members of the Chasing Spaces team are doing for "girlish" what Sue-Ann Post has done for "dyke" - they are reclaiming the word, stripping it of its traditional pejorative connotations and celebrating its true meaning.

*Voices from the Bottle* is unselfconsciously "girlish". Though it is by and about women, its appeal is certainly not limited to those who have a pair of X chromosomes! It is a group-devised work of

astounding variety and range. *Voices from the Bottle* is a kaleidoscope of story, song and surprise. It is a masterpiece of theatrical invention and musical imagination.

There are several "runners-up" in the Women's Season that deserve much closer attention than space allows. Kate Johnston's flighty monologue might be a prayer that has arisen out of frustration and despair, but it has undeniable appeal and it is delivered with dynamism and style. I also thoroughly enjoyed Koral Island's musical poetry - a pulsing blend of Patti Smith and John Cooper Clark. Lynda Gibson proved conclusively that

she can act as well as she can deliver gags.

Even the mercifully Short Works season had its highlights. One of them was *The Kiss*, directed (and presumably adapted) by Marianne Bragge, in which the delicate art of story-telling was shown to be alive and kicking. *The Kiss* is a sumptuous emotional slide-show. *Focussing*, by Karen Ermacora, is the only other work in the three-week MSW season that should have been longer. Ermacora's solo dance

*The Second Year with the Moon*, choreographed and performed by Barbara Doherty, has a remarkable ideokinetic sophistication.