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# Drama of online angst

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One of the best parts about being able to break out of children's theatre and present a play for grown-ups is that the actors get to swear their heads off for a change.

For Barking Gecko Theatre artistic director Jeremy Rice, another positive in directing the new play *Apocalypse Perth* is that it has been written by his wife Kate, whose 2007 play *The Mozart Faction* was about the trials and tribulations of a community choir plunged into a hostage crisis.

The enthusiasm of the amateur performers rent asunder by conflict in *The Mozart Faction* is also at the heart of Kate Rice's *Apocalypse Perth*, which examines warring factions in the cyber-world.

Presented as part of the Artrage Festival, the play is as much about the perils of anonymous internet blogging — where everyone is a performer and no one is safe — as it is about the passions and sensitivities of amateur thespians, the Rices say.

The verbatim theatre piece was inspired by the increasingly vitriolic online exchanges that followed a critical review of a show called *Rock*

Apocalypse early this year in a community hall in Perth's northern suburbs.



“I thought it was very interesting and full of passion and some vitriol and I forwarded the link to Kate as a bit of a giggle and she came back and said we should put this on as a play,” Jeremy says.

Kate tracked down and interviewed more than 40 people — played by just four actors — involved in the online forum and then dealt with the challenge of how to stage their conversations without a shaped narrative, by trying to be true to the emotions of the protagonists' words.

Experienced actors Greg McNeill, Craig Williams and newcomer Whitney Richards are joined by Vanessa Trengove, who was cast after auditions in Padbury and knows nearly all the people she is portraying on stage.

The Rices also wanted to enter the lions' den by performing Apocalypse Perth at the Padbury Community Hall this Saturday during a break in its Blue Room season. “I never wanted anyone to think this is a bunch of inner-city theatre types having a go at community theatre,” Jeremy says.

The play also will pose a test for reviewers because it examines how theatre is judged and the impact of criticism on performers, he says.

Although it is produced by — and is about — people obsessed by theatre, Jeremy argues it goes well beyond navel-gazing. “A lot of this is about the internet. If we did this play 15 years ago just about theatre and theatre reviews, I think that would make it very navel-gazing. The big question is about the way people post things anonymously on the internet.

“Fifteen years ago all we could do was write a letter to a newspaper or stand on a soapbox in the park.”

It examines a universal human trait familiar to anyone subjected to front-fence gossip or hate campaigns.

Apocalypse Perth is at the Blue Room from tonight to November 8.  
Bookings: 9227 7005.

STEPHEN BEVIS

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 Have your say

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