



Monday, September 21, 2009

Review, I Am Jack, the Stage Show



I am a huge fan of Australian author, [Susanne Gervay](#). Her book, *I Am Jack*, is an absolute winner. So imagine my delight when we were able to attend Monkey Baa Theatre's performance of *I Am Jack* in Brisbane recently! We loved it, and judging by their response, so did the rest of the audience.

Here's [Monkey Baa's blurb](#): *I am Jack explores the journey of Jack, a smart, funny 11-year-old boy being badly bullied at school. This true story takes us on a touching and sometimes comical journey as Jack moves from victim to victor. This 55 minute one man show introduces audiences to the concept of a performer telling the story using physical and vocal transformation to create not only Jack but all the other characters in his world.*

Using the metaphor of an island in the central design concept, Jack tells his story from what at first appears to be the confines of his bedroom. As he tells his tale, lighting and sound emphasize Jack's emotional turmoil and create the shape and persona of the bully in his life.

If you really love a book, sometimes a movie or theatre adaptation can be a disappointment. When I realised only one actor was to play all the characters in the

story, I must admit my doubts intensified. But Tim McGarry was just as brilliant being Jack, as he was being Nana. He honed in on details to bring his characters to life - like Mum folding washing when she was feeling anxious, Nana's arthritic gait, and Jack putting one finger on his grandfather's grave when he spoke to him.

The set of primary colours and cartoonish feel, soundtrack and lighting all contributed to my enjoyment of the story. The bully, George, was cleverly represented by a sinister, almost satanic cut-out. I really like the way the author, and the adapters of her work, managed to have so much humour in what is essentially the story of a terrible time in a child's life. There were lots of opportunities for laughter, but also moments when 150 children sat transfixed and made not a sound.

After the show, Tim McGarry asked for audience questions. He encouraged us to think about what we'd seen, and really nailed the theme. He also shared his own experience of bullying. Tim's empathy was obvious, and his suggestion for children to help victims by speaking up and including them in their groups, was practical and achievable. I love to think that message will make a difference some day to a child who needs help.

Theatre is a wonderful way to involve kids in literature. I have a soft spot for all the creative arts, but as a former drama teacher, I extol the virtues of theatre and drama for kids every chance I get. If your child hasn't yet been to a live theatre performance, why not take advantage of your next opportunity to attend? Monkey Baa has an exciting [program of shows](#) on their site, and [their workshops](#) offer opportunities for children to develop creative skills that will truly benefit them for the rest of their lives.

{This delightful experience reminded me that I must re-read *I am Jack*, and *SuperJack*, by Susanne Gervay. I'm excited to tell my US readers it's to be published there by Tricycle Press in November this year! Look for my reviews soon!}