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Reviewed by Cameron Woodhead
July 22, 2011

BODY ARMOUR

*** 1/2

Ilbijerri Theatre Company

The Malthouse, until August 12

Reviewer: Cameron Woodhead

IRREVERENT educational theatre sponsored by the Department of Health, Ilbijerri's *Body Armour* will travel to schools and prisons for two months, returning for a longer public tour in 2012. Aiming to educate those at risk about the realities of hepatitis C, Kamarra Bell-Wykes's script, with some spry dramaturgy from John Romeril, moulds the lesson into a fast-paced comedy drama.

Three young people - Rose Thorn (Maurial Spearim), Harley Davidson (Leroy Parsons) and Dannii Boye (Sandy Greenwood) - wait for test results in a clinic. Each has been exposed to the virus through blood pacts, backyard tattoos, and unsterilised piercings. Far from discounting these rituals of commitment and initiation, the show suggests a rich cultural pedigree. Cod anthropology is woven into wonderfully observed clowning focused on instantly recognisable insecurities of youth - the body armour everyone wears.

Parsons' machismo and comic lust hides desperate fear; Spearim's tough lesbian exterior a yearning to be loved; Greenwood's exclusive schoolgirl and her vapid sorority (as hilariously skewered as Chris Lilley's Ja'mie character), defend a fierce need to belong. Perhaps only Ilbijerri, our oldest indigenous theatre company, could speak with such empathic attunement to marginalised groups.