



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

[www.theatreguide.com.au](http://www.theatreguide.com.au)

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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## **HARD TO BE A GOD**

Old Clipsal Site, Bowden  
Until 14 March 2012

Review by Aaron McDonald

Inside a cavernous warehouse on the old Clipsal Site, 200 people watch lights come up on a semi-trailer and share a thought – this isn't going to end well.

"Hard to be a God" is a Hungarian production from renowned film director Kornel Mundruczo. It's awful, shocking, terrifying, horrible and absolutely brilliant.

Five men are keeping three prostitutes against their will in the truck's trailer, forcing them into sex slavery. One character is not, however, who he seems: he is actually an interloper, but one who can take no action, despite the horrible events which will transpire.

A useful mantra is given to one or two audience members before they enter: remember, they are only actors in a play. The irony takes a while to slam home; they are not actors. The three girls on stage, yes; but the same scene is being replayed around the world a hundred, a thousand times over for real.

At one point, the protagonist breaks the fourth wall makes an impassioned appeal to the audience – who will step in and take the place of a pregnant 16-year-old girl, about to be degraded and likely killed? There will obviously be no response, and there was none; it is a painful synecdoche for our inaction.

And this is the central premise, explained to the audience from the very first line – inaction. If God exists, and has granted us free will, how can he possibly interfere with our lives – even for the better?

In any case, the above mantra – they are just actors in a play – doesn't work; for many, the performances are too real or the details too confronting. The first casualty is thirty minutes in, a young man assisted out of the warehouse. He doesn't return. He is followed by 15 others over the course of the show. At the first instance, the show is paused briefly and the concerned cast make sure the audience is okay; it is somehow worse when they launch straight back into the scene, as if someone has flicked a switch in their heads.

The performances are stunningly real, disturbingly so; it is an unlucky audience indeed that wishes the acting was less believable. The production values are fantastic – the huge space dwarves the scant two hundred seats and the set and lends a sense of heavy foreboding to the proceedings. The attention to detail is astonishing – every inch of the set has been dressed appropriately. For an added ghoulish touch, one of the slavers is wearing a Clipsal 500 shirt.

Even taking translation into account – the play is staged in Hungarian for the most part, with English surtitles – the script is an outstanding work. There is an almost rhythmic flow to the script – horror and happiness peak and trough, and then they slam together like a fatal car wreck. It's laden with irony and dark, dark humour; at one point, one of the girls' captors laments that she had to leave her dog in Hungary because of laws on importing animals into Australia.

It's not perfect. The plot is occasionally confusing, and the show's metaphysical bookends crack slightly the suspension of disbelief with clumsy and incongruous dialogue. But these minor issues are likely a consequence of translation.



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“Hard to be a God” is exclusive to the Adelaide Festival, presumably because no other state would touch it. It’s an intensely horrific and emotional piece of theatre, and it is the best production Adelaide has seen in some time.