

# Gambling to win

Elton John's *Aida* gets a premiere production at Gasworks Arts Park.

by DAREN POPE

**M**elbourne loves a good musical. That fact is easily supported by the huge number of big-ticket productions that continue to roll into town. But there are also small local troupes making a difference.

Boutique music theatre company, Devanesen Productions is one such outfit. In the niche market of newly staged musical theatre works, Devanesen reigns supreme. With no funding or sponsorship to speak of, the local company has staged a total of 10 productions since its inception in 1999. Shows include *Tell Me on Sunday* (Webber and Black), *Songs for a New World* (Brown),



Jessie Yates (*Aida*), David Bleier (*Radames*). Photo by Andy Rogers.

*Rent* (Larson) and a concert version of *The Wild Party* (Lippa). Their latest effort is a production *Aida* (Elton John and Tim Rice) at Gasworks Arts Park.

The driving force behind the theatre group is Sunayan Devanesen. The actor/producer/director attributes the company's success to a simple philosophy focusing on people

and theatre.

"We are passionate about combining great repertoire with fantastic talent and believe theatre should be about a commitment to the process, the work and each other," says Devanesen.

"We focus on telling stories in order to elicit a response and connect with an audience.

It sounds a little idealist and may explain why we have no money!"

Devanesen says a love of theatre has brought him to produce his own work.

"Essentially, I craft a piece as a theatre fan," he says. "We always take a minimal approach when we start which removes the burden of focussing on the excesses of flying sets and elaborate costumes.

"I have a belief that if we find the truth in the piece it should connect with your audience regardless of aesthetics."

This will be the first time *Aida* has been performed in Melbourne. The production will raise money for Oxfam in support of African nations for whom the themes of oppression showcased in *Aida* resonate today.

Gasworks Arts Park  
April 18 – 26  
Details: 9699 3253,  
[www.gasworks.org.au](http://www.gasworks.org.au)

Read the full interview online at [www.bnews.net.au](http://www.bnews.net.au)



## Vaudeville man


**W**riter/performer Michael Dalley, known for his award-winning musical comedies *Vaudeville X* and *Intimate Apparel*, has joined forces with director Anna McCosin-Own to create a new musical.

*Death in White Linen* is described as a 'satire about ambition, beauty and English country house design'.

The play dissects the life of Brian, a personal injury lawyer with a star on the rise, his tasteful wife, their sons and their Labrador retrievers,

Tom and Lucy.

The third show for the new High Performance Company, *Death in White Linen* draws on English music hall, revue and variety for a satirical take on upward mobility and the search for beauty.

Dalley won the Green Room Award for Best Original Songs in Cabaret for *Vaudeville X*, which was performed at Midsumma Festival this year. 

La Mama  
205 Faraday Street, Carlton  
April 23 – May 11  
Details: 9347 6142

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