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## RESERVOIR DOGS

*Reviewed by Deborah Fabbro, 19 Aug 2022*

**Author:** Quentin Tarantino (adapted for stage with the knowledge of Mr Tarantino.)

**Director:** Craig Lenaine-Smith

**Theatre Company:** The Mount Players

## REVIEW

Since its premiere at the 1992 Sundance Film Festival, Tarantino's film 'Reservoir Dogs' has become a cult classic. It is an interesting study of human nature, the breakdown of social order and how people react to challenging situations, set against the backdrop of a botched diamond heist.

Those who know the film will know the storyline of six criminals, who do not know each other's true identity, that are brought together by a crime boss to steal a haul of diamonds. While the heist, which we do not see, is in progress they are ambushed by the police, leading them to believe that one of them is actually an undercover officer.

While the original film has a cast of males, Director Craig Lenaine-Smith, has flipped the gender of all the protagonists which is an interesting concept. So, does this work? The human nature side is universal, so yes. The retained expletive language and bloody and physical violence of the film? Well, you will need to see it and decide for yourself. As the director says in his notes, "Will it spark conversations? I hope so". Judging by the buzz of the opening night crowd in the foyer at interval and after the performance, there were definitely sparks. Whether the gender flip works or not, and that is in the eyes of the beholder, the director and cast have obviously worked hard to establish the temperament and disposition of the characters, and all are portrayed well. The audience certainly get the feeling that these are empowered females; the actors as well as the characters.

Staging of the production is very fluid, as is required by the multiple scenes, and works very well due, in no small part, to Alison Dudon's excellent set and fabulous scenic art. Giving us the interior of a warehouse where the criminals hole up after the heist and its aftermath, it is also cleverly used to create various other locales as we go back in time to see the recruitment of the crims and the setting up of the crime. These transitions were efficiently and smoothly handled by Stage Manager Amanda Watson and her crew of Tamara Heaney, Christine Walker, Margaret Cameron and Poppy Lenaine-Smith.

The lighting design by William Shaddock is stunning. He creates a wonderful mood to the piece and emphasises the action taking place. The soundtrack throughout the play is from a radio station's 'K Billy's Super Sounds of the Seventies' show. This was, in fact, provided live by 'The Red Apple Band' who were located on a mezzanine upstage. The band comprising Oscar Lenaine (MD and Bass), Tim Francis (Drums), Sophie Cox (Guitar), Brandon Appleby (Baritone Sax) AND Mia Platt (Vocals) were excellent. On some tracks I did find the mixing to be a little off as we didn't always get Ms Platt's beautiful voice coming through as it should. They played a great range of tracks and, while they covered the scenes changes

well, there were a few times when I felt the musical interludes could have been a wee bit shorter. Aside from the music, appropriate sound effects were designed by Alex Brown and added credence to the overall production.

Great costumes from Jenni Mills and her assistant, Natasa Xerri, captured the essence of each of the characters. And some of the quick costume changes were capably handled. All that blood, I wouldn't want to be responsible for laundry duties in the wardrobe department! Fight Director Lyndall Grant choreographed admirable fight and physical confrontations which were believable and well executed by the cast.

With such strong creative and technical features of the production it was fortunate that the performances matched. In many ways it is an ensemble piece, but each character also gets their moment to shine as an individual. As Jo Cabot, the mastermind behind the heist, Justine Press commanded the stage with a seemingly pleasant manner while one could feel the steely persona underneath. Miranda Johnson-Jones encapsulates the surprisingly, for one so young, menacing disposition of Jo's daughter Nice Gurl Edie in a strong performance. Menacing, in varying degrees, is a trait that the six hired crims have, and each of them skilfully conveys this. Inga Hamilton's Ms Blonde is imposing both physically and through her intimidating manner. Ms Pink is pushy and knows her own mind and Jess Ryan puts this across well. In only her second role on stage Kate Mooney takes on the minor role of Ms Blue and also Police Officer Geri Andrews who is held captive by Ms Blonde and Ms White. She really communicated the fear Geri feels as Ms Blonde terrorises her. Ms White was excellently portrayed by Jenny Heriot capturing the swagger of the character but also a human side to her. Newbie, Robyn Millard also plays two roles, Ms Brown and Holdaway, Ms Orange's mentor. She makes the most of both roles and they are believably different as befits the characters. Also new to the stage was Melissa Forge in the role of Ms Orange. She was most convincing in this duplicitous role, and I hope she continues to pursue her acting journey and that I see her in future productions.

Director Craig Lenaine-Smith's passion for this production shows through and he has schooled his cast well in creating the tension that the piece requires. My only quibble was the inclusion of an interval as this did break the tension and suspense.

In her Welcome from the President notes in the programme, Karen Hunt states that this is 'a contemporary piece of theatre that will perhaps place some of the patrons a little out of their comfort zone'. That may be the case, and perhaps not everyone will want to be taken there, but the company is to be commended for being willing to "push the envelope". Finally, I have attended many productions at The Mount Players over the years but had obviously not attended an opening night before. I commend the company on their hospitality after the performance.