



# A night of powerful theatre

By **Chris Dickins**

*Dust*, currently performing at the Ballarat Mining Exchange, is a terrific night of theatre.

Presented by Hubcap Productions, The Asbestos Diseases Society and the University of Ballarat Arts Academy, *Dust* is terrific in both senses of the word.

It is a highly entertaining, deeply stimulating night of multimedia theatre and is also a terrifying insight into corporate greed and the pain and injustice experienced by countless people.

The evening is one of two parts.

In the first half the Mining Exchange is turned into part expo space and part sideshow alley.

The audience first faces a raised stage area where a slide show depicts, with frightening familiarity, the ever-present existence of asbestos in suburban Australian lives.

We are then free to roam among several miniature performances in the booths that line the Exchange.

These performances range from mini lectures to intimate family dramas.

From time to time, attention returns to the main stage for the great music of Mark Seymour (former Hunters and Collectors frontman) and the Victorian

Trades Hall Choir.

The energetic, highly skilled students of the Academy turn easily from rousing musical numbers to parodies of cigarette advertising (asbestos in the filters) to funny acrobatic representations of how asbestos fibres behave.

These young performers appear to revel in the numerous challenges thrown their way and once more display the breadth of talent we have percolating in the heart of our city.

The second half sees the audience settled into a more formal seating arrangement and the show kicks into another gear.

The opening number, *Stars of Antarctica*, is a real killer.

Mark Seymour's beautiful song tells of a brave man who journeyed to Antarctica and surveyed all its challenges only to die a terrible death through pulling down his backyard shed.

A magic moment.

The randomness of fate hovers over the production and a sense of unease creeps through the audience as we all recollect that family fibro garage that was pulled down or the workplace we used to go to where too many colleagues have passed away too young.

Be sure to watch for a scene and

song called *Fibrotite*.

In this segment, we watch the citizens of a spotless, optimistic suburbia set up their dream homes with a shocking optimism.

Soldiers returning from WWII line up for their reward, a suburban house that is lined with a potential killer.

Once again the attendant song from Mark Seymour and the cast is an absolute winner.

Donna Jackson, the writer and director of *Dust*, has assembled an almighty team of helpers and collaborators to achieve her ambitions.

She has a great eye for exciting theatrical imagery and employs a great variety of techniques to realise her vision.

She is to be congratulated for her artistry and her heart.

Like the best theatre of the Australian Performing Group at the Pram Factory all those years ago, *Dust* reminds us that theatre can be a powerful tool for social/political themes and can be an agent for social change and the pursuit of justice.

And like the best of such Australian theatre, it does so with a laugh, a joke, a great song and a larrikin smile.

Go see it.