

49.5.83 SM 17

# Images of hope and support

## THEATRE

By BERWYN LEWIS

### THE PACK OF WOMEN

Devised and staged by Robyn Archer.  
With Jane Clifton, Judi Connelli and Michele Fawdon.  
Band: Andrew Bell, Dianne Spence, Jeremy Wesley.  
Musical director: Andrew Bell.  
Designer: Roger Kirk.  
Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Theatre Centre.  
May 17 for six weeks.

From the moment the three players seat themselves at their card table the message of this female political cabaret is essentially clear, strong and inspiring.

Everything you ever wanted to know about female psycho-sexuality but were afraid to ask is exposed in this rapid succession of witty and potent songs, anecdotes, stories and poetry gleaned from sources as far afield as Dorothy Wordsworth, Yoko Ono, Gene Pitney, Bette Midler, Bertolt Brecht, Dolly Parton, Germaine Greer and Robyn Archer herself.

Staged among the cards and dice of the game of life, flanked by slides (consisting of work by Mary Leunig, as well as portraits which which pay tribute to forgotten, long-suffering and silent partners of famous men) this cabaret tells all. Nothing is sacred or taboo.

There are twists on fairy tales. Frog princes remain frogs. Birds in gilded cages break out. The revenge of unrecognised female labour and oppression sweetly strikes out in a cool and sophisticated style, a combination of Brechtian and black soul cabaret.

With each song suburban dreams,



Jane Clifton, Judi Connelli and Michele Fawdon . . .  
no heroine left unsung.

mythic romance, coupling, double standards and hypocritical values are blown to the breeze.

Robyn Archer's brilliant songs stand out. They're delivered by a suave, slinky and very assertive cast. Judi Connelli's style is distinctive and outstanding. She aims her songs at the audience with unmistakable relish and restrained irony.

Michele Fawdon's approach is softer but her message is nonetheless spiked with low blows and stinging truisms.

Jane Clifton's versatility is apparent as she trots out tangos, belts out blues and combines just the right amount of sleaze and cynicism, particularly in the definitive song on free enterprise, In Business.

This keenly phrased song by Robyn Archer makes a plea for legalising and protecting prostitutes instead of perpetuating the hypocrisy.

In Women in the Wings (a song

by Maddy Prior) Jane Clifton pirouettes like a puppet, portraying those women who refuse to seize the strings of their destiny.

The show which creates cryptic and powerful portraits of women, from street level to penthouse, is embellished by the superb saxophone and clarinet playing of Diane Spence.

The images hit home, right into the kitchen sink and out again, offering instant hope and support.

Legitimate pornography, gratuitous violence, self-mutilating clothing for women and underwear hardware are just a few of the visual themes.

Archer's direction is precise and powerful. She has packed in a multiplicity of moods, tough, touching, raising and lowering emotions, spreading a spell with each dramatic twist and turn.

This is for all women, young and old. The Pack of Women will play to packed houses. It leaves no heroine unsung.