

The New Zealand Herald

Theatre review: Educating Rita

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By [Janet McAllister Janet](#)

5:30 AM Saturday Aug 25, 2012



Jodie Hillock and George Henare in Educating Rita.

This class-clash Pygmalion dramedy - an oldie but a goodie - makes a great choice for the debut production of the professional Newmarket Stage Company. It's a relatively gentle, fourth-wall two-hander - wonderfully written, full of jokes and bons mots.

And they do a very good job. George Henare - who, in his mid-60s, must be the hardest-working man in Auckland showbiz - enjoys a little lightness (with undercurrents of tragedy) between the high drama of Awatea just past and Death of a Salesman to come. He plays the elder academic Frank suitably quietly and deeply, belying the character's insistence that "there's less to me than meets the eye".

His working-class student Rita (Jodie Hillock) lives up to his claim that she's "the first breath of air that's been in this room for years". Hillock's Rita caught between two worlds is bright and spunky from the outset.

Both actors are at ease in their long conversations, director Adey Ramsel using movement to keep us interested in a long play of vignette-like scenes set in one room.

Ramsel also designed the set as a collective cultural imagining of an academic's den - wonderfully shabby, cluttered, with a leather wingchair, shelves falling down, and the whiskey hidden behind the Eliot.

Playwright Willy Russell criticises working-class culture - his own roots -but doesn't look to the middle classes for all the answers. In the play's sharpest line, Rita accuses Frank of liking "to keep your natives thick, because that way they still look charming and delightful". But Russell's not preaching; this is a funny, entertaining night out into another world.

May Newmarket Stage Company enjoy a long and healthy life.

Where: Opera Factory, Eden St, Newmarket, to September 8

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[DC \(New Zealand\)](#)

11:20 AM Sunday, 26 Aug 2012

I saw this play and thoroughly enjoyed it, spoilt as I was by Henare's excellent acting skills and Ms Hillock's also excellent acting skills. This was a very enjoyable production, one of the best I've seen this year!

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[AB6 \(Devonport\)](#)

10:54 AM Thursday, 30 Aug 2012

Theatre at it's best. No question. I'd forgotten what an absolutely riveting play this was/is and George Henare & Jodi Hillock are just brilliant in their parts. Terrific set too. Just one of the best night's of theatre you could ask for. Might even go again. Did I mention I really liked it!

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[Monty Wawatai](#) (New Zealand)

11:08 AM Sunday, 9 Sep 2012

This production is an absolute gem. Henare's portrayal of the cynical - whiskey swilling, academic Frank is a perfect contrast for Hillock's sassy and educationally hungry Rita.

I would later be advised by an expert that Hillock's rapid fire dialogue and accent (from the outskirts of Birmingham apparently) was thoroughly believable. Whilst Henare's acting prowess is legendary in NZ, I (and my accompanying friends) were staggered by Ms Hillocks powerful and evocative performance.

One might ask; "Where has this actress been?". Congratulations Newmarket Stage Company, for a most excellent production all round. May you flourish and prosper. We cannot wait to see what you, Henare and Hillock have to offer in the future.

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