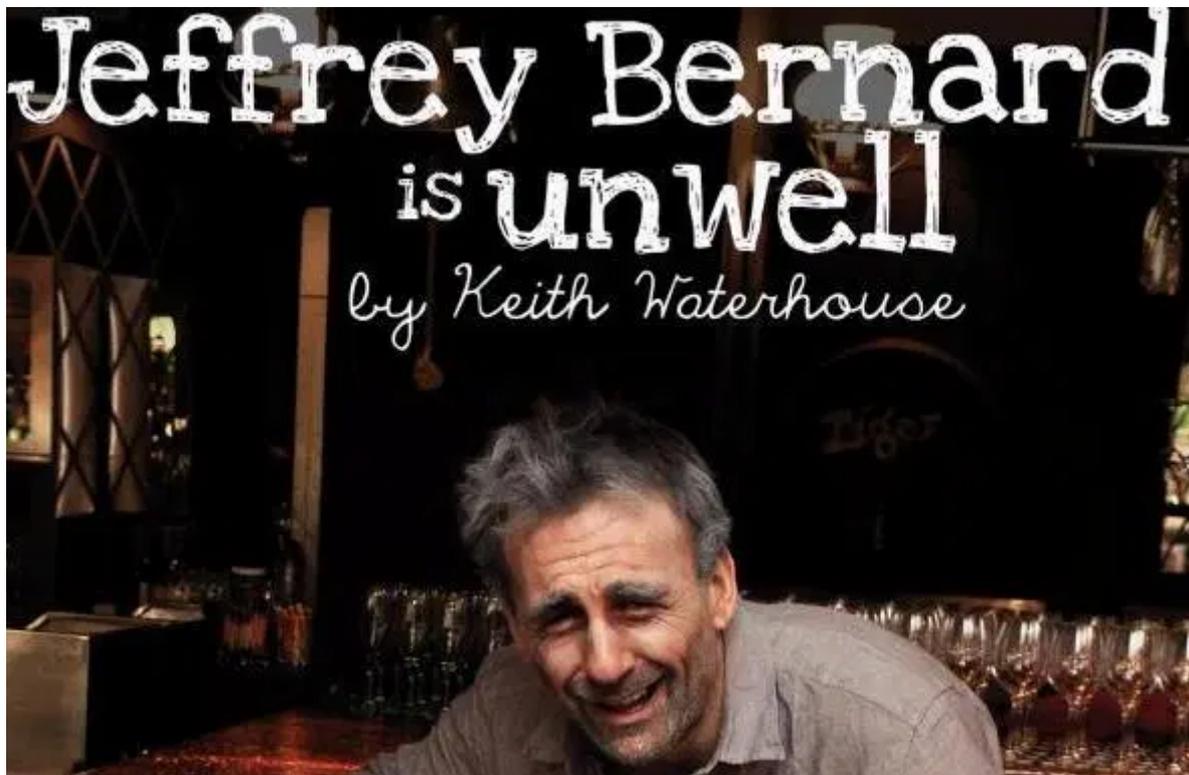


Review: Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell

kentridgecommon.com/review-jeffrey-bernard-is-unwell

February 26, 2013



What could be more boring than listening to a drunk relating his life story in a pub? Well, not if the drunk is Jeffrey and you are watching The Stage Club's latest production, *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell*. Based on a real journalist, this play is not only a biographic retelling of Bernard's life, it is also a candid exploration of the experience of being a man. This happens all within the confines of a pub setting as you are invited to take the proverbial pint with Jeff.

For the witty and unabashed comedy it is, this production boasts a wonderful talent in the form of Nick Cheadle who plays the lead role. His ability to handle a huge chunk of lines within a rather natural and beautiful speech pattern without dropping his energy deserves to be applauded. The progression of the character in terms of emotions and his health was dealt with flawlessly and one cannot help but to be drawn in to Jeffrey Bernard the man. Despite Cheadle mentioning in the programme booklet about the challenges he faced, his masterful performance certainly compels me to call him a liar. In fact, I caught some glimpses of Robert De Niro and Robert Downey Jr. in Cheadle's Bernard.

The supporting cast, Bob Scheer, Jane Grafton, Edward Rahtz and Heron Holloway, did not pale in comparison. Tasked with playing multiple roles (Rahtz and Grafton were given 19 and 10 different roles respectively!), all of them gave stellar performances. It is as if their transitions between the various roles were a matter of flipping a switch. The complicated entrances and exits went smoothly as well. Special kudos go to Scheer who could switch characters in less than 10 seconds while delivering different British accents

despite being an Australian. With such commendable performances, the various characters in Bernard's life sent me on a journey of utter disbelief and amazement with scenarios like triplet infant shuffling and cat racing.

Aside from their individual performances, the chemistry between the whole cast is amazing. The timing between Bernard's recount and the re-enactments were spot on and the energy among the actors was palpable. While it is unlikely that the actors had a great deal of time to work with each other, whatever Nick Kenny as a director did to bond them together worked brilliantly.

My only issue with this production would be its technical elements. Due to the static structure of the play, it could have been enhanced by varying the lights and sounds. For example, during the subsequent portions in which Elizabeth Smart appears, save for the lighting required to illuminate her, the rest of the lights could be dimmed. This is so as she often delivers rather important or beautiful lines. As for sound effects, more could be added during the scenes with longer re-enactments. Additionally, the existing sound effects seems a little hesitant in coming in. This should not be so as the characters do need to react to some of them such as orchestral music by Mahler.

With the structure of the play surrounding Bernard relating his story most of the time while being punctuated by funny re-enactments, it is conceivable that not everyone would enjoy this show. However, patient and giving audiences would certainly be rewarded and touched by the wit and candour of the play. Having watched five productions thus far by The Stage Club, this production is without a doubt the best I have seen.

With the end of this review and my school work piling up, it's time to pour myself a stiff drink and listen to some Mahler.

Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell runs from 27 February – 2 March at DBS Arts Centre – Home of the SRT. Tickets can be purchased through [Sistic](#) or any of its ticketing counters.