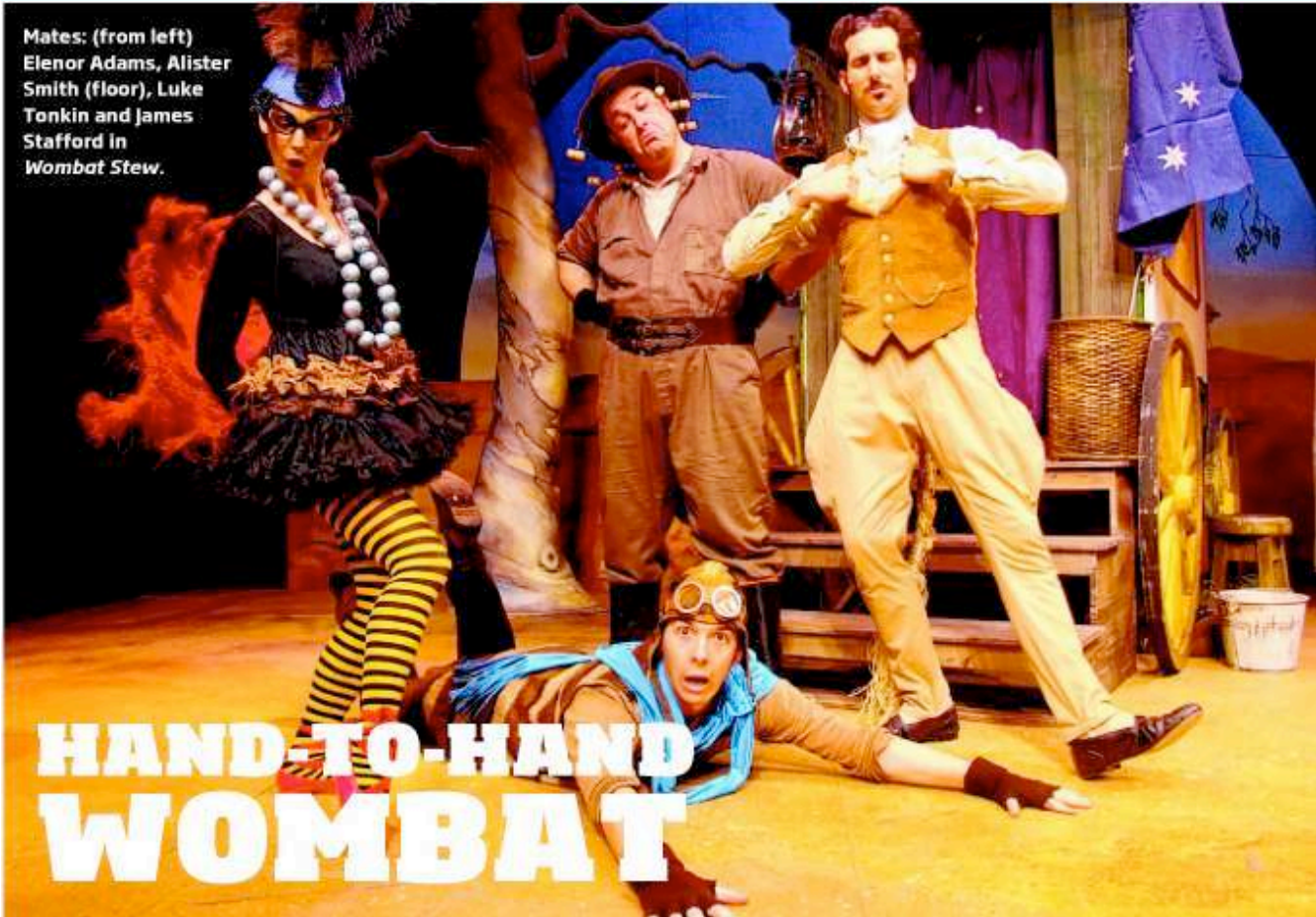


ARTS | Hit. | 13



Mates: (from left) Elenor Adams, Alister Smith (floor), Luke Tonkin and James Stafford in *Wombat Stew*.

A children's classic story finds a new stage, writes **Michael Lund**

THE classic children's tale *Wombat Stew* is being served up on stage in Brisbane and promises to be a hilarious musical romp for young theatregoers.

All the gooey chewy, yummy tummy favourite lines from Marcia K. Vaughan's original children's book have been preserved. But playwright Gary Young has added much more, including several new songs in his stage adaptation.

He is no stranger to musical comedy after working on the Australian productions of *Mamma Mia!* and *Menopause the Musical*, but he found writing for a much younger audience a challenge.

"I can't believe I'm going to

say this, but it would probably be 30 years since I've worked on a kids' show," he says, laughing.

One of the challenges was working with the shorter attention span of youngsters, and an audience that prefers to be involved rather than sit and watch in silence.

"The show has to have a specific energy that really drives it along and we've made this very high-energy so there's a lot of involvement for the kids," he says.

"They get a chance to sing along, they do their actions, all sorts of things, so they're very much engaged and included in the piece with a lot of vocal involvement."

The wordplay that has attrib-

uted to much of the success of the children's book is maintained in this tale of a dingo attempting to prepare a stew pot for the captured wombat.

Other bush creatures including an emu, echidna, koala, lizard and platypus all conspire to help their wombat mate, which leads to some of the new songs such as *You've Got to Have a Feather or Two* and *The Bug Conga*.

When Young was writing the production he found himself twisting and contorting his own face and body as he tried to play out how each of the book characters would look on stage.

"I was sitting at the laptop writing these words and thinking, 'Now, how would the

platypus say that?' or, 'How would the echidna do this?' and you have to do that with all the characters," he says.

"So I thought, 'Thank God there's not a camera on this!'"

The original *Wombat Stew* book is now in its 25th year, so it's a fitting celebration to have the stage version.

"The nice thing about it is that it's about friends rallying," Young says. "They rescue their mate and I think that's a really nice thing about it, which is probably not in the European fairytales, so the friendship thing is really important for kids and I've pushed that too."

While the stage version of *Wombat Stew* gets set to entertain the littlies, another show



aimed at slightly older audiences has opened at the Brisbane Powerhouse.

Advanced Screening 2010 is a romantic comedy-drama aimed at teenagers and their families and explores the problems of

young love.

Wombat Stew, Judith Wright Centre, starts Tue until July 23, \$12/\$20, www.judithwrightcentre.com

Advanced Screening 2010, Brisbane Powerhouse, until July 24, \$22 to \$30, www.brisbanepowerhouse.org