

The New Zealand Herald

Beyond the Box at Mercury Theatre

By [William Dart](#), Reviewed by William Dart

Auckland Opera Studio comes up with the perfect setting in what was once Auckland's Mercury Theatre, cranked up, in the words of director Patrice Wilson, for its double bill of Beyond the Box.

Wilson's sleek take on Brecht and Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins* is stylised monochrome, with the singers and props in white and the stage an ominous black box.

While Anna 1 tells the tale, Anna 2 dances it, suitcasing their way from Memphis to San Francisco, until they return to their Louisiana home.

As Anna 1, Andrea Creighton understands Brechtian restraint and cabaret deadpan, and yet her operatic soprano thrills in Weill's gorgeous lines. The male quartet (Jack Bourke, Philip Rhodes, Brendan Casey and James Ioelu) are brutally funny.

They're busy too, shuffling around stage, spreading Weill's barbershop honey over Brecht's acid drops.

There may be perilous a cappella in the hilariously vicious *Gluttony* but, like other problems, it seems as much opening night nerves as anything else.

Peter Scholes and his Auckland Chamber Orchestra experience a few navigational challenges too, but how can one express anything but wonderment at the sight and sound of a mighty orchestra ranked around a banjo?

After interval, Schoenberg's *Second String Quartet* was solidly delivered by Dianna Cochrane's quartet.

Soprano Jennifer Aylmer, apart from an unbridled outburst in the third movement, understandable in this theatrical context, sings Stefan George's poems with perception and phrasing.

The quartet is a display piece for Michael Parmenter's choreography.

The hyper-energetic Mariana Rinaldi (the sinuous Anna 2 from *Sins*) has the first movement to herself, a demonic and virtuoso workout to volatile music.

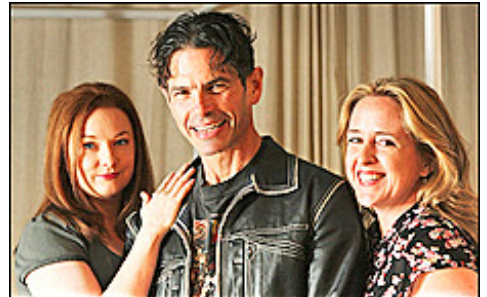
Parmenter joins her for a devilishly ingenious pas de deux, danced, it seems, to a stopwatch.

"I feel the air from other planets" is the famous quote from the quartet's final song.

And, on this occasion, the air one was feeling also had something to do with the city's uncaring treatment of its grand old performance venues.

In 2004, it was *Idomeneo* that you missed at your peril; this year it is *Beyond the Box*, with just one more performance tomorrow night.

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Andrea Creighton, Michael Parmenter and Jennifer Aylmer in *The Seven Deadly Sins*.
Picture / Greg Bowker