

*Bustown* is one of those rare plays that creates its own universe – *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* was another example this year, playing next door at STC. Writer **Lachlan Philpott**, who just won the Griffin Award, gets in and amongst language, cutting it up and making something new.

The futuristic desert setting is reminiscent of *Mad Max*, from the pigeon English to the re-hashed costumes made of scraps of clothing, and the re-appropriation of twentieth century detritus, such as hub caps, bus seats and tyres, into functional umbrellas, beds. It's as though humanity landed on the moon of its own past, and is re-discovering it with fresh and curious eyes.

The inhabitants of *Bustown* are suffering from a collective amnesia. Having lost touch with the rest of the world – “The Other” – they live an isolated communal existence in the desert, under the watchful eye and guidance of “mother” Sylvia Steering (**Stefanie Smith**), who has devised a set of daily rituals that act like social controls, and keep the community together: don't talk about “The Other”; wait for “The Driver”; every day, practice “the Remembering”.



Sarah Hansen as Corolla, in *Bustown*.

The sheer “otherness” of the setting and dialogue sucks you into their world, and the staging at the ATYP creates a little universe within its large wooden pillars where you can almost see the sand and feel the heat. Seeing this play on a gusty Sunday afternoon, with the fierce harbour winds banging at the walls, didn't hurt at all.

Hanging from thick ropes laced with tyres, four Punkbirds act as kind of Greek chorus to the action, and as foils to our protagonists. Like the people of *Bustown* they seem immobilised, the feathers useless, their will to fly atrophied over the years. But our young characters, on the edge of adulthood, are far more determined to fly the coop.

Young would-be lovers Cressida (**Laura Turner**) and Axel (**Peter Jamieson**) are spurred on by a cascade of unanswered questions, adolescent angst and burgeoning sexuality. The most interesting character, however – and the most compelling performance – is **Emily Morrison** as the tomboyish inventor Cortina, who invents things like “flying machines”, but makes the curious decision to stay in *Bustown*, while helping her sibling and his girlfriend escape.

**Sarah Hansen** was also thoroughly rambunctious and outrageously cute as the slightly crazed toddler Corolla, who has a more-than-healthy relationship with her imaginary friend Coupe (**Angela Sceats**).