

Dropping The F Bomb!

Declan Greene, one half of Sisters Grimm, throws down the theatrical gauntlet once again... with faggots and gravy!

ARGUABLY THE hardest form of theatre to write well is comedy, and of all the options available – satire, sketch, alt, black – farce seems to offer the least opportunities to also make pointed or poignant social commentary.

With its larger-than-life characterisations, slapstick, implausible plot twists and physical humour, the genre has been unfashionable in recent years. Its roots, however, go back to Greece and the earliest theatre. It evolved into the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, was refined by the French and made common by Shakespeare. It influences Wilde's *The Importance Of Being Earnest* and reaches its modern zenith in *Noises Off*. In television it's the stuff of *I Love Lucy* and *Fawlty Towers*. In film, it's the fallback position for Hollywood and Bollywood comedies.

Declan Greene's *The Homosexuals, Or Faggots* returns theatre-goers to farce. Greene is well known as one half of Sisters Grimm (along with Ash Flanders), who have gained a reputation for innovative fringe theatre. Their camp, melodramatic and experimental work hits hot-buttoned topics and often involves homoeroticism. Add some farce into the mix and you've got Greene's latest work. This time he's taking aim at political correctness.

"I've always had a very dorky love of farce," says Greene. "You know, the classic comedy with mistaken identities and running in and out of swinging doors, and broadly stereotyped characters? For example, in *Boeing Boeing* the main character goes to extreme lengths for fear of being outed as a polygamist, and in *La Cage aux Folles* a gay couple try to pass as straight.

"Those kinds of plays don't get written much anymore because they used to be driven by the main characters' fear of being outed as a sexual deviant – which isn't such a big deal these days. But what people *do* care about – particularly in the gay community – is being thought of as racist

or sexist or trans-phobic. This is often in conflict with the anti-PC nature of a lot of camp or gay humour."

The point Greene is making is distilled in the title of the play, "homosexuals" or "faggots"? The story begins with two happily partnered and wealthy gay men, Warren and Kim, discovering an offensive item on the local pub menu – faggots with mashed potato and gravy. The two prepare a politically incorrect themed Mardi Gras party, dressing in offensive costumes only to meet an unexpected and easily-offended guest – a radical queer academic – where the farce explodes.

Greene says he was partly inspired by the 2014 "female or she-male" controversy on *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

"I was really interested in how that played out," he says. "There was defensiveness from a lot of the gay cisgender ex-contestants who criticised trans protestors for being over-sensitive, when nearly all of them had told a sad story themselves. They had been hurt by homophobic language or behaviour at some point in their lives. Plus, their 'sisterhood' toward trans ex-contestants evaporated the moment they said they was uncomfortable with these aspects of the show."

Transgressing political correctness is popular in the queer world (*Little Britain, The Catherine Tate Show, Absolutely Fabulous*), but are we laughing at ourselves or is it just an excuse to laugh at someone else's expense? *The Homosexuals, Or Faggots* holds a mirror to the gay community. Can we justify using the F word among ourselves?

"It definitely feels great to say to the straight world, 'You can't use that word but I can'," says Greene. "There's power in that. But that power only manifests when the perimeter is respected. My friends and I use faggot as a term of affection all the time but it still hurts like hell when some guy calls me a faggot for holding my boyfriend's hand in public."

MORE: *The Homosexuals, Or Faggots* plays at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre 17 February – 12 March, then the Griffin Theatre Company, Kings Cross March 17 – April 29.

