

Nowra play helps local co-op to dazzling start

Summer of the Allenz, by Louis Nowra, directed by Shoot Like a Girl, and presented in association with Canberra Youth Theatre, at Canberra Youth Theatre, Gorman House Arts Centre, Braddon, from Wednesday to Saturday, January 27 to February 6, at 8.30pm. Youth Theatre.
Reviewer: ANN NUGENT

LIVING through adolescence in the 1960s on a Melbourne Housing Commission Estate does not seem to be the most exciting material for drama, yet playwright Louis Nowra (the young Lewis of the play) transmutes the unpromising material into a humorous, poignant script.

The families of Singapore Street live out their failed lives against the background of the Cuba Crisis and with fears of an imminent communist take-over of the "Australian way", which is characterised by a xenophobic hatred of new-comers, the "ref-fos", and the yawning gap between men and women.

Imprisoned by poverty, each individual takes his or her own original path of survival-madness. The observer-narrator, young Lewis, wanders about, on the look out for the first UFO landing in Australia. His obsession with UFOs seems a mild mad-

sion with UFOs seems a mild madness compared with the eccentric behaviour of the grief-crazed postman, Mr Pisano, whose deliveries lessen as he takes to walking backwards on his rounds. In turn, these obsessions are innocuous compared with the reality

of incest, violence, separation and suicide, which are part and parcel of family life on the estate.

The authentic 1960s world portrayed by Nowra seems more like a script for a futuristic, sci-fi movie than a look into the past. Yet, in a scary way, that past has proved to be the future.

Lewis's story of growing up is tied in with Dulcie's. Dulcie, younger than Lewis, is thirsty for life. She is a free spirit and is sure to be punished for her daring. Dulcie and Lewis are the only true innocents in Nowra's script.

Shoot Like a Girl is a collective of three young directors, Lucinda Gleeson, Heaven Muecke and Stephanie Tickle. *Summer of the Aliens*, their first production, is a dazzling start. The quite complex structuring of the play, double narration and locations evoked simply by direction, are competently handled. But, the triumph of the young directors is the way in which the performers are in touch with their characters. This subtle connection with character is a rare treat — and for 16 characters, well, that is no small achievement.

Obviously *Shoot Like a Girl* has received help along the way, from the

received help along the way, from the Arts Council and a grant, from Canberra Youth Theatre, and from seasoned performers in the show.

I strongly recommend that you go to see this production and marvel, as I did, at the enterprise and talents of these young Canberrans.