

metro stage



Cold comforts ... Sam Routledge and Hamish Fletcher in the chaos-laden kids' caper *Mr Freezy*.

respond to the anarchy," he says. "We make a big mess and there's food flying everywhere. It's a boisterous show with really loud, pumping music and lots of energy. They are allowed to laugh at things that they aren't usually allowed to. They enjoy themselves and interact."

Routledge is quick to confirm the high-energy form of the show. "It's like doing aerobics for 45 minutes," he says. "We employ a large, grotesque performance style and there's lots of bobbing up and down."

"It's an incredibly team-based show," he explains, adding that the puppeteers often create characters by combining different objects. "We work very closely with each other. Everything has to be in sync."

One character that requires deft team work is Robo-chicken, a character Routledge says is like

'We literally went character shopping.'

Chris Kohn

Voltron or a Transformer. With its own theme song and saviour-like status in the story of the play, Robo-chicken is made up of a number of different scoops, animated by two puppeteers. "He's a kitchen Transformer," Routledge says, laughing.

Influenced by traditional cartoons such as early Warner Brothers, Routledge says his puppetry troupe draws on cartoon violence and slapstick in particular. He mentions *The Ren & Stimpy Show* as a core influence because he and his cohorts "like the grotesque". Kohn says *Mr Freezy* draws on Disney and Pixar films, as well as fairytales of "goodies and baddies".

But, above all, it is a celebration of playfulness. "We went for it with a lot of play and a lot of silliness," Routledge says.

"The show is about playing hard and investing a lot of imagination and energy into playing. We want the children to know that they can find objects in the kitchen and make a character and that committing to that play is really worthwhile."

MR FREEZY
Monday and Tuesday, Riverside Theatres, Parramatta, 8839 3399, \$15.
STC Wharf 2, Walsh Bay, Thursday to July 11, 9250 1777, \$15.

Anarchy in the kitchen

Mr Freezy gives kitchen objects a new lease on life, writes Clara Iaccarino.

Performer Sam Routledge describes *Mr Freezy* as a "sugar rush for kids", likening live performances to arena rock concerts, as the young audiences are prone to jumping up, dancing and pumping their fists in the air.

"The kids love it," Routledge says. "They respond like they are at an amazing concert. I'd have to say it's a bombastic response. They really feel part of the action."

The tale of Scoopy, an ice-cream scoop who can't stand the cold, *Mr Freezy* is an "object theatre" production in which all the characters are created from food,

kitchen utensils and packaging. Set in a 1950s ice-cream van, the Arena Theatre Company work draws on the talents of puppeteers from Melbourne-based ensemble Men of Steel, a troupe of graduates from the Victorian College of the Arts.

As Scoopy dreams of visiting distant lands, he travels around the van encountering various characters, such as his kindred spirit, Scrappy, a lolly scoop, who has always been bullied, and the two happily join forces.

There's also the dishrag preacher; Prong, a hot dog machine and Scoopy's nemesis; and Mr Freezy, a flashing neon sign that becomes Scoopy's guardian angel.

The story centres on Prong kidnapping Scoopy's mother.

The evil hot dog machine is plotting to turn the ice-cream van into a mecca of hot food, an obvious nightmare for Scoopy and his ice-creamery friends.

For director Chris Kohn, the greatest thrill was "auditioning" the characters at kitchen supply stores, supermarkets, op shops and green grocers. "We literally went character shopping," Kohn says. "We found this little scoop and his open mouth lends him this quality of always being overwhelmed by the world."

"He was like an adolescent, working things out."

Routledge says that by playing

with different objects, the team was able to find the character of each one. When they stumbled on a more old-fashioned and tarnished scoop, it became Scoopy's mother.

"The look of the object can often tell you straight away," Routledge says. "You need to decide if it is vulnerable or strong, good or evil. We investigate the character thoroughly."

Central to the creation of *Mr Freezy* was a desire to make a show that was anarchic and fun, Kohn says. What they didn't want to create was a work heavily laden with messages, that was preachy or overtly "educational", like much of the theatre for young people Kohn has experienced. "The kids really