

# NIGHT FLIGHT TO SATURN

**The current uncertainties that characterise our time are an inspiration for dramatic writing. Things we assumed to be stable and constant – our economy, our occupations, our planet – are under threat. The sheer unpredictability of life excites us in the theatre because ours is an artform powered by surprise.**

My play, *Saturn's Return*, relishes in the joy of uncertainty, but perhaps also in its cruel effects. In the play, we meet a surefooted young couple. They love each other. They love sex. They love life. And they are thoughtful enough to ponder their place in the world from their Sydney apartment. They play out their fantasies. They speculate about their futures.

They challenge themselves to yearn for more.

Like most lovers, Matt and Zara have powerful imaginations. Everything is bravely called into question and Matt and Zara soon lose grip on each other and the here and now. As they do, their Sydney apartment floats into outer space. It'd be sad if our young lovers crash and burn in the atmosphere of a

cruel planet. And, sorry, but you'll have to see the play to find out whether or not they will.

I am currently in London where *Saturn's Return* was workshopped and performed in a reading at the National Studio. I had assumed that the play was about some very Sydney people with jokes about some very Sydney obsessions like real estate and vanity. But when the actors analysing the script in London brought the phrase "Thatcher's children" into the rehearsal room I gained confidence that *Saturn's Return* is about a shift in mood that reaches beyond my city limits. They spoke about how a lot of things were promised to their generation that now they question.

I hope the play captures something the pertinent for the Gen Y tribe, wherever and whoever they are. I hope they hear their voice on stage. And I hope their parents and employers will also hear it, though perhaps with different ears.

In *Saturn's Return*, Matt recounts how his schoolteacher lined up all the kids and asked them to

look in a plastic tub. The teacher promised that what little Matt and his peers would see inside was the future. There was a mirror in the tub. I must admit being a bit puzzled by this image in the play but it has suddenly made sense to me.

My generation was told the future was for the taking. I doubt every generation has been told that so clearly. Our schooling absorbed advances in social equality. Technology granted us greater access to each other and our world; whether virtual or actual we are expected to go places. The result was an empowered generation entering the workforce at a time of great promise and choice. But sometimes certainty shifts to doubt, as it has of late.

The Gen Ys are approaching thirty and our confidence is a little shaken. I have witnessed a painful moment of flux around me - often in people searching for things to explain away an unfamiliar loss of control. The astrologers out there blame Saturn, the bringer of age, which completes its orbit every 29.5 years. I know very little about astrology and only rely on it for this appealing metaphor (and a title for my play). Whatever the cause, now is a moment of crisis for the emerging generation.

But I trust that renewal springs from turmoil. It's a chance for the suddenly less certain, less employed, departure lounge longing generation to stop and interrogate the legacy they will leave behind. If that claim of increased access to the world is true then surely it follows that we have more access to remedy problems confronting our world. Whatever the response, it will be from this moment of crisis that the authentic Gen Y emerges. Our idols change from pop stars to politicians, from Paris Hiltons spending the inheritance, to thinkers engaged with our world. But first we have to ask what we want. Everything should be called into question.

Tommy Murphy

*Saturn's Return* plays from 24 July in Wharf 1.

