

## **SPREADING ROOMERS**

La Mama

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Homelessness, drug addiction, sexual abuse, poverty, mental illness, social marginalisation, chronic illness, and sex work are all serious social issues. For many, these 'social issues' are only conversation topics – academics study them, politicians talk about them, and health and welfare workers treat them. However, people living with these 'social issues' rarely have a publicforum in which to share their experiences.

A new stage production, "Spreading Roomers" is changing all that. Through stories, poetry and music, performers share snippets of their lives. All performers are local residents (or ex-residents) of rooming houses in St. Kilda, South and Port Melbourne. Performers tell it as it is for them. By sharing these intimate stories with humour and grace, performers transform these social issues into day-to-day experiences.

Each performance touched me in different ways. My highlights were Wendy Butler's laughter as she spoke about the Gat Girls, Paul Whitby's love for his rat, Justin MacDonald's analysis using theoretical physics, Dean Biggs' list of things he will miss when he is dead (including kissing). Debbie Lustig's yamaha keyboard and her sensational voice, Jo Hennessey's smile and her sad (not mad) poetry, Isabella Fel's blue Mondays, and guitar players with songs of love and loss. Most of all, I will remember the genuine smiles at the end of each performance.

Publicly disclosing intimate stories with direct honesty takes enormous courage. So a performance like this is a rare find. Academics, politicians and health professionals would all benefit from putting their bums on a seat and listening. Like Dean Briggs, I too wonder what Peter Costello would think.