



## The Fiveways,

Wilson Street Car Park, West End

**James Harper**

THE property developer gazes at the deserted street. He doesn't see the sinister figure in a black and white jockey's outfit turning cartwheels behind him, but he senses something strange.

"Weird, weird eh?" he sings.

I think most of the audience would have agreed. It was a touch weird to be sitting in a West End car park on a chilly night watching the Brisbane Festival premiere of Eugene Gilfedder's *The Fiveways*, a full-blown contemporary chamber opera, featuring serious 20th-century compositional techniques, melodic lines that zoom all over the place – plus the occasional vaudeville digression – and a surreal plot with no happy ending.

Early on, during the odd hiatus with nothing much happening except a bit of piano noodling, it looked as if mounting such a work, in such a setting, might have been a major miscalculation.

However, *Fiveways* is so well put together and performed that any

difficulties arising from the relatively demanding musical idiom, or the physical location, quickly fade out.

The story is less predictable than it first appears, the script is funny, the atmosphere somewhat haunting. Gilfedder's musical setting of the Aussie vernacular is clever and inventive, and all the singing is good, especially the work of Lionel Theunissen, as the developer, Qing Chang-Li, as a Chinese shopowner, and Alana Scott, as a singing fish (I told you it was weird).

Choreography and acrobatics, sound and lighting, sets and costumes are all excellent.

There is a contemporary theme to this surreal tale, to do with the damage that can be caused by eagerness to sweep away the past in pursuit of money. At the same time, the production has a strangely old-fashioned feel.

The characters look and sound like they've escaped from the era of Mo McCackie and Norman Lindsay. There are echoes, too, of more ancient theatrical traditions, the clowns and devils of *Commedia dell'Arte*.

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