

First Night

Father, son and media empire

THEATRE

The Young Tycoons

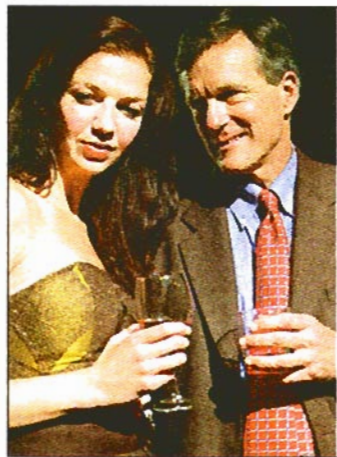
Darlinghurst Theatre,
September 8

Reviewed by Stephen Dunne

You could only make this stuff up. Imagine three media companies. One is based in television, with remnant print interests, run by a bloke with a dicky heart who loves a smoke and a flutter.

The second is now Yankee, but retains mostly tabloid local newspapers. The third, newspapers only, draws much comfort from the supposed superiority of its bigger pages and tonier demographic.

The first two are family businesses (the third once was), with succession issues. As these second-generation media patriarchs slide towards wealthy death, they face the issue of sons of questionable suitability and skill. The sons (Jonathan Gavin and Michael Cullen) are deeply contrasted, the former patrician and educated in financial matters, the latter blokey and thick. Their fathers (David



Agreeably dark ... Pellow and Hammond. Photo: Cameron Baird

Ritchie and Peter Kowitz) also contrast, though they are equally obsessed with the acquisition and exercise of power.

The sons have girlfriends (Ashlie Pellow and Zoe Tuckwell-Smith) whom they are encouraged to marry for commercial reasons. One budding magnate has a flack (Rebekah Moore), the other a

long-serving, loyal executive (Nicholas Hammond). There's also a broadsheet journo with a story idea about the youngish tycoons (Christopher Johnson, the playwright of this work).

Johnson's play is an entertaining and often savage exploration of generational change in business, and the likelihood that the skills of capitalism are not heritable.

Its narrative occasionally gags (the end of the first act is especially loose) and a few plot resolutions stretch credulity, but there are some bitingly excellent gags - made even funnier because none of these caricatures exists. Michael Pigott's production features excellent design (Katja Handt on production and Stephen Hawker on lights) and a strong sense of dark satire. The men dominate, especially fathers and sons, though Hammond's foot-soldier is especially memorable.

While Johnson's corrective satire is agreeably dark, it perhaps suffers due to its deep improbability. Surely there could never be a world this shallow, grasping, elitist and vena?

Tip-off keeps audience in seats

MUSIC

Sydney Symphony

century works by Bartók, Stravinsky and Schönberg to see

dream in its energised rhythms and big soulful tune. One of the