



Maxine Mellor

The dark side

A playwright has drawn on her experiences during the floods to explore human behaviour, writes Chris Herden

destruction occurring in the world. She is unemployed, overweight and overwhelmed to the point of apathy. Most of the town where Clara lives is submerged in floodwaters but her pristine modern home remains undamaged. Feeling isolated and helpless, she wallows in self-pity, idly wasting her days watching depressing images of natural disasters, and programs that parade images of the type of woman Clara could be.

"She's lost her job, stuck in a rut, doesn't really know who she is or what she wants in life and doesn't know how to react to this disaster happening outside," says Mellor, adding that Clara is trying to be a good person but as her mental torment intensifies, it physically manifests itself into something repulsive. She sends her relentlessly upbeat partner Eric on a macabre quest to collect elements of nature such as feathers, sticks, and even a dead cat. These are all clues to the monstrosity Clara is secretly creating in her study.

"I was interested in the different psychological

responses that people have to disasters. Breaking open the psyche of these characters and figuring out what is going on in their heads - this is a new challenge for my writing."

THROUGH DESTRUCTION YOU CAN BUILD SOMETHING ANEW

QTC artistic director Wesley Enoch is well acquainted with the budding author who is a three-time winner of the Queensland Theatre Company's Young Playwrights Award.

"Maxine has a kind of whimsical approach to dark issues," he says. "When she is dealing with something incredibly serious she makes it playful and fun and you find yourself laughing at something you shouldn't be laughing at. She is able to harness a humour that is incredibly human, one that allows people to recognise themselves in her plays."

Mellor cannot imagine herself not writing. "I

love creating worlds that are similar, but still a little different to my own, ... plus... it's fun to put words in people's mouths."

"She creates interesting characters," says *Trollop* actor Amy Ingram. "Clara reminds me of people who just want to switch off and shut down, people who say 'no, I don't want to think about that, it's too frightening'."

Influenced by the tragedy of the 2011 Brisbane floods, Mellor knows first-hand the damage and heartache a deluge can cause. The SES came to her assistance when her Ashgrove home was inundated in January this year.

"I'm hoping *Trollop* will raise questions about how we deal with the huge events in our life, how we deal with relationships that are going nowhere," says Mellor. "Through destruction you can build something anew. It has to turn ugly first before things get better."

Trollop, 1 to 17 August at the Bille Brown Studio, Qld Theatre Company. www.queenslandtheatre.com.au

Twenty-seven-year-old Maxine Mellor is one of Australia's most exciting young playwrights. Already she has scooped up a swag of awards, commendations and grants. Her latest play, *Trollop*, won the Queensland Premier's Drama Award 2012-13, entitling the work to undergo an intensive workshop program under the guidance of industry professionals. This two-year page to stage journey is about to culminate with a Queensland Theatre Company world premiere season at the Bille Brown Theatre beginning 1 August.

Like many of her earlier plays, *Trollop* reveals Mellor's insatiable fascination with the darker side of human behaviour. The trollop of the story is twenty-something Clara, uncomfortably numb, immobilised by the enormity of

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