

Director's notes

THE CLEAN HOUSE
Fortune Theatre
Dunedin, New Zealand
March 2007

When I began writing notes for this gorgeous play, I found myself re-writing them. Then I stopped altogether. Somehow everything I wrote *about* the play didn't illuminate it, or provide a proper context for it. I was puzzled because providing illumination and context is my job – presumably I'm supposed to be good at such things – but my initial scribbles only smeared the lens through which the play's light is shone.

Then I realized that like most works of art, the play speaks for itself. And, like good poetry, there are measureless depths of truth and humanity beneath the text. Yet Sarah Ruhl's deft hand leaves only the merest trace on the page. Her characters offer limitless ideas expressed in clear, crystalline phrases, each one like a glimmering iceberg. Why should I try to embellish?

I am thrilled to be working with a group of collaborators who believe in this play as much as I do. Sometimes I think if it were not for the theatre, I wouldn't have any perspective – on my life, on mortality, or on love. It may sound funny to write it down, but the cast, the design team, the Fortune Theatre staff and Friends have taken on this project as an act of faith. Why else would I fly half-way around the world to direct a play? They have, I think, not only enriched my life by taking me up on this crazy idea of directing *The Clean House*, but they have given Dunedin a gift. It's my privilege to be a part of it.

It's also my privilege to work on a play that makes me laugh at suffering and wince at happiness. During these last several weeks we have made diving expeditions beneath the surface of the text to discover the unseen contours of every submerged thought. This play forces us to practice trotting jauntily across a tightrope between love and calamity, suspended over a net of humor and sorrow. Not an easy task, but a worthwhile effort that widens our humanity and hopefully gives us the gift of perspective so sought after in live theatre.

So. Although I can't tell you succinctly what the play is really *about*, I can tell you that it's had a great impact on me. My simple hope is that it will have a memorable impact on you.

(I also speak at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs.)

Jef Hall-Flavin