

ADELAIDE THEATRE GUIDE

PRICE CHECK! THE MUSICAL

Review by [Maggie Wood](#)

Having reviewed this show as a work-in-progress back in 2014, where much of the action was described rather than portrayed, it was gratifying to see it come to full life on the stage of the Bakehouse.

Much progress has indeed been made in its iterations since then, in Melbourne and now in Adelaide, to the extent that its full potential is starting to show.

The Adelaide cast we saw previously not only reprise but develop their roles into more fully rounded characters: we begin to see the complexities of life for Narelle Sims, the checkout chick whose life seems to be passing her by until she begins to look inwards for strength and confidence. Narelle is played beautifully by Catherine Campbell, giving authentic voice to a woman who's been in the doldrums for too long.

Fahad Farooque brings the house down with his musical number "Nuts about Fruit", exposing his passion for his job as fruit and veg attendant with his sights set on becoming manager of the section one day. He consistently does his utmost with the material, making much of his performance the highlight of the show.

Rory Walker as the grumpy supermarket manager Mr Butler raises the comedy stakes with his highly stressed red-faced character as he wages war and mind games on his staff, and delivers a particularly delicious performance exposing his motives in the Coward-esque song "Who's Pulling the Strings?".

The fly in the ointment of retail workers everywhere – the customer – is represented by elderly Jewish lady Mrs Zimmerman, a part inhabited by Jacqy Phillips. Phillips' portrayal consistently balances between annoying, funny and tragic as she yearns for the community hubs that shops used to be in her younger years.

While she may be annoying she is, ironically, the only human connection the shop workers have with their community, and the writers have had the foresight to mention that with the introduction of self-service check-outs, even this fragile thread may become severed. In any case, Phillips eats this part up and it's difficult to work out whether she has some of the best lines in the show or whether she just makes it look that way!

Co-writer (along with Cerise De Gelder) and producer Sean Weatherly plays David Fisher, the 'everyman' of the show who bumbles between whether he wants his marriage to work or not, whether he's got the guts to work really hard for the managerial position he wants, or not, whether he's willing to make a decision and really go for a relationship with Narelle, or not. He's the hub around which much of the action seems to revolve – after all, unlike his co-workers he's been to Uni – but as in the real world, he's really not the centre of the universe at all, and each person's tale plays out with or without him.

Weatherly's portrayal of David differs wildly in style and definition to those of his fellow cast members and the difference is quite distinct. This tends to slow the action and burst the stylistic bubble created by the rest of the team, and gives the audience perhaps too much work to do to adapt between the two different modes.

Providing excellent backing as ensemble are Ali Walsh, Celeste Barone, Barbara Nutchey and Selena Britz. Ever-present as a Greek Chorus they dance their way through in their supermarket uniforms, playing everything from staff to angels, and when they sing the sound is glorious.

Choreography by Dana Jolly shines for the ensemble but is patchy for those cast members who don't have dance as one of their strengths. Similarly, while direction by Nicholas Cannon is mostly strong it has periods where it seems to drop, particularly during dialogue-heavy scenes where physical definition is lost.

Piano accompaniment is provided by the ever-excellent Peter Johns, who also gets to double as a cocktail waiter at one point – multitasking!

The star of the musical numbers has to be "Christmas in October" which opens the second act. The utter embracing of high camp in presentation and choreography had this reviewer in fits of laughter rarely experienced in a theatre, and showed just how good this production can be should it get the right support - and perhaps that's the final ingredient needed for this show.

It has been seeking to be a genuine Aussie musical, but just like settled Australian culture its roots come from many other parts of the world to make that unique mix.

As well as the inspiration taken from Broadway, there are other obvious strong influences coming from classic 1970s British comedy ("Are You Being Served", "On The Buses") alongside sharp nods to the work of cult movie director John Waters ("Hairspray", "Polyester").

Were "Price Check! The Musical" to fully embrace and exploit those influences further, it could be the definition it needs in terms of direction that makes all the difference.

With so many of us experiencing the pains and joys of working in retail at some point in our lives, this show taps into an affection we have for its characters and their experiences. Here's hoping "Price Check" keeps growing and flourishing.