

WOOF! WOOF!

Writer RAY MOONEY (*Everynight Everynight*) always has something to say. He says it to MEGAN SLOLEY about his barking new play *Mouth Of The Dog*.

In Ray Mooney's latest work, three ex-mental patients are forced to take on the characters of Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot and Muammar Qadhafi (Gaddafi) to prove their own sanity. The point, as stated up-front by counsellor Caroline, is that the three supposedly maddest people in the history of the world are sane. Or mostly sane. Mooney reckons that Hitler may have become manic depressive towards the end of his career. The play argues for the sanity of these blokes through its mardi gras mix of bizarre fact, political analysis, psychology, exuberant theatricality and wicked funny atypical satire: satire which makes virtues out of follies and vices; satire which works through stand-up comedy. Then there's a fourth patient who "becomes" the character of John Howard towards the end. This local dog of a politician is the most vicious and brilliant Mooney construction.

Mouth Of The Dog was written 10 years ago but hasn't been performed 'til now except as a reading. For Mooney, the read through in '99 revealed the need for some serious re-writing and "because it really is an over the top, bizarre, outrageous, experimental, expressionistic thing" a very special group of people to bring it to life. He believes that under the direction of 23 year-old Efsia (Fiz) Fele, this Melbourne Writers' Theatre production will take the script to provocative extremes. "Don't go and see it if you're vegetarian," jokes Mooney and mentions something about carcasses on stage.

Mooney did tons of research on the three (or four if you count Howard) notorious politicians featured in *Mouth*. He believes, very strongly, that Hitler, Pol Pot and Qadhafi were not mad, but evil. "Or people who've been evil in the past," he says, quick to qualify. "I think Qadhafi has learnt to 'become a really good guy.' Qadhafi -- a good guy? "OK. Not really," admits Mooney. "He's just one of the smartest blokes in the world. He created an incredible situation where he was funding all the terrorist organisations without people really knowing or being able to prove it -- he just recently admitted to the Lockerbie." But according to Mooney, Qadhafi has been superseded. "The world took what he set up and they ran with it. They took it to the extreme, to the point where now the concept of suicide bombers is a very important part of the way people behave in certain cultures. In the next 100 years, it is just going to be so immensely dangerous."

Mouth Of The Dog has critical messages about our crazy current times. For Mooney, this is mandatory - theatre should always have something important to say. "But look," he says, "theatre has had the rug pulled out of it by



documentary television. Documentary TV in the last 2 years has supplanted what theatre used to do. The great plays by Chekov and Ibsen and Tennessee Williams, they were about issues. David Williamson -- people love to trash him but he's never written a play that wasn't about something important." Then there's the way that is communicated. "It can never be boring for one moment," says Mooney, "I don't think playwrights have the right to be boring. It must be theatrical at the expense... of... words, for me."

Like his beloved Mike Moore, Mooney is a troublemaker. He can't understand why there aren't more people like Mike Moore in Australia. "We just bombed the shit out of Iraq... We've created concentration camps for refugees. Sure people have written essays and had debates, but I'm upset that important writers haven't gone the next step, putting their careers on the line for what they believe in. When reminded of Andrew Wilkie -- the intelligence officer who resigned because he knew that Iraq was no threat to Australia, Mooney says, "Sure. But he didn't immobilise himself on the steps of Parliament, did he?"

Mouth Of The Dog is on at the Carlton Courthouse, 3:30pm, Drummond Street, Carlton, from 3rd to 11th October. Tickets \$20/\$15. For bookings, phone 9712 0210.