

From soap to slippery stage life

Paul Tassone is tackling the fear and the insecurity, **Colin Rose** writes.

PAUL Tassone is a brave man. At a time when there seem to be more actors chasing fewer jobs, he has quit steady work on Channel Seven's *All Saints* and a role he has played for five years.

"I absolutely loved doing it, but it was time to go," Tassone says. "The only reasons to stay were fear and insecurity."

While his character, nurse Nelson Curtis, is on air until May, Tassone, 36, has dived back into stage acting, swapping fear of unemployment for the fear of live performance. "I'm shitting myself," he says. "I've only done two plays in the last 10 years."

His colourful language is perhaps inspired by the role of Eadric Longshaft, the taciturn, first-millennium warrior who is Tassone's character in *Silence*, the play by Moira Buffini that kicks off Belvoir St's B Sharp program of alternative theatre next month.

Tassone says *Silence* is "a raunchy comedy about sex, gender, marriage, God and belief, with a *Crying Game* sort of twist".

Although the play's action takes place 1000 years ago, the characters share many of the same millennial anxieties we have at the beginning of the 21st century. "It rides the wave of what's happening now," Tassone says. "The sense of the apocalypse with what's happening in the world."

Eadric has a religious vision, possibly brought on by his taste for magic mushrooms, and becomes besotted with Ymma, a teenage princess.

Ymma is played by Sophie Cleary, 22, a recent drama school graduate who moved to Sydney 18 months ago and has picked up a small role on TV in *McLeod's Daughters*. She says Ymma is "very raw, angry and volatile" and "a pretty meaty role for a young woman".

Is there anything Tassone knows now that he wishes he had known when he was Cleary's age and just starting out?

"I spent years trying to do the right performance," he says, "rather than going for it from the gut. There is no right, no perfect performance. There is only your performance. That's what's going to make you unique. If it's not coming from the gut, it's just flashy acting."

And what about the employment prospects



APOCALYPSE HERE AND NOW: Paul Tassone and Sophie Cleary in rehearsal last week for *Silence*.

Picture: ANTHONY JOHNSON

for actors of Cleary's generation: are things getting better or worse?

Tassone says *All Saints* is attracting top-notch talent because there's little TV drama being made elsewhere. "We've had the most amazing actors come on the show for just one episode. I'd be running around the set shouting, 'Woo-hoo! I've got a scene with Barry Otto!'"

"When I graduated from

There is no perfect performance. There is only your performance'

drama school," Cleary says, "we were told, 'You're entering into the industry at a very difficult time and things are going to be hard'. But was there ever a time when someone wouldn't have said to a group of actors that it's going to be hard?"

PRODUCERS' HOW-TO GUIDE

THE 2006 B Sharp program will be launched tomorrow night at the Seymour Theatre Centre, the temporary home of Belvoir St Theatre while its Surry Hills headquarters is refurbished.

This year B Sharp's Lyn Wallis has shifted the focus to emerging directors.

"There's a next wave that's really ready to rock," she says.

Inspired by her experiences in mentoring that next generation, Wallis wrote *In Good Company*, a how-to guide for indie theatremakers.

It's not a book about acting, but about the behind-the-scenes art of producing.

"It's a nuts-and-bolts, A-to-Z guide," Wallis says. "Anybody who reads this book, even people who have never produced, should be able to put on a show."

"The partnership between the producer and the director is so critical. The producer should have as much respect as the director."

In Good Company is published by Currency Press.

"I think drama school can be dangerous. It teaches you what to do when you

get a job, but it doesn't teach you how to survive as an unemployed actor. It's not practical. I'm doing my own thing, writing, and trying to keep active in that way."

Tassone has his own creative project, a movie script he hopes to produce. He says his wife,

who runs a corporate training business, is supporting them while he works for peanuts on the fringe scene.

"Does she have a job for me?" Cleary deadpans, and the two actors crack up.

Silence opens at the Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Theatre Centre, on May 5. Tickets \$28/\$22. Bookings 9699 3444.

GALLERY NEWS

Portraits, portraits everywhere

All four levels of the Museum of Contemporary Art have been linked around *Masquerade*, a selection of contemporary self-portraits from international and Australian artists from the 1970s to the present, exploring ways in which we represent our true and imagined selves.

Participating artists include Australia's Mike Parr and Sam Taylor-Wood, who also feature in solo exhibitions. Taylor-Wood's photographic series *Crying Men* (2002-04), portraying 27 well-known actors, is featured as well as *David* (2004), an intimate, hour-long video of soccer superstar David Beckham asleep in bed. All three exhibitions run until May 21. Museum of Contemporary Art, 140 George



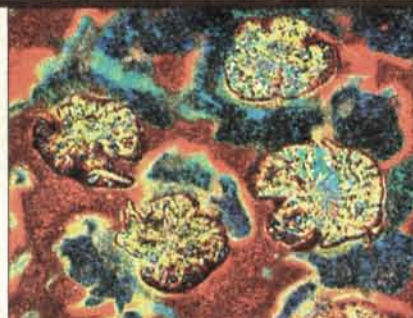
PORTRAITS AHOY: Samuel Fosso's *The Pirate*.

Street, The Rocks. Open daily 10am to 5pm. Phone 9245 2400 or see www.mca.com.au.

Great-tasting leftovers

Salon des Refuses, the selection of works not chosen for the Archibald and Wynne prizes, is almost as popular as the official exhibitions. For 15 years, guest selectors have gone through the hundreds of portraits and landscapes that aren't hung at the Art Gallery of NSW, in the spirit of the 1863 protests in France that saw works of French impressionists, rejected by the French Academy, displayed in a rebel exhibition.

Until May 14. S. H. Ervin Gallery, Watson Road, Observatory Hill, The Rocks. Open Tuesday to Sunday 11am to 5pm. Phone 9258 0173 or see www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au.



PIONEERING: *Synaptic Bliss Oda #1* by Aziz + Cucher will be shown at new gallery Arterreal.

New kid on the block

Acclaimed New York photographers Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher (Aziz + Cucher) are the artists of choice for the inaugural exhibition at Sydney's newest visual arts gallery, Arterreal.

Located within an 1890s heritage fire station in Rozelle, the exhibition space debuts with an exclusive showing of *Synaptic Bliss*, a series of digital prints and video projection by the pioneer artists.

The duo's 15-year collaboration has resulted in dozens of solo and group exhibitions at prestigious venues such as the Photographers' Gallery in London.

Arterreal founder Luisa Catanzaro hopes the space will be Sydney's newest showcase for cutting-edge visual arts. Until April 29. Arterreal Gallery, 747 Darling Street, Rozelle. Open Tuesday to Saturday 11am to 6pm. Phone 9818 7473 or see www.arterreal.com.au.

LOUISE HALL