

PRESS REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS & PREVIEWS:

“ALL ABOARD”

Created, written and performed by Tom Greder

Directed by Scott Witt

Design by Jonathon Oxlade

Lighting design by Andrew Meadows

Music by Chrischi Weber, Trent Arkleysmith & Tom Greder

Premier season Sue Benner Theatre, Metro Arts, Brisbane November 2007

www.tomoskar.com

“Utterly hilarious, sweet and never failing to impress, Greder’s show is as close to perfect as I’ve seen in quite some time”. Kane Adrian, Australian Stage

“All Aboard can not be described well enough to capture its genius. It is simply a play that must be seen to be believed”. Lauren Anderson, Arts Hub

“While All Aboard is an unconventional piece of theatre, I have not seen something so original and so poignant for a long time”. Lauren Anderson, Arts Hub

“Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant !” Cate Brown, Scene Magazine

“Surreal, baffling, childlike and utterly enchanting”. Alison Cotes, Stagediary

“Just as Tom Greder used no words to communicate this most joyous experience, so I have no words to convey the glory of it all”. Alison Cotes, Stagediary

“This little 85 minute show proved to be a mighty gem”. Eric Scott, Radio 4EB

“As the train begins its journey, the performance becomes nothing short of mesmerising.” Kane Adrian, Australian Stage

“The entire show passes by almost instantaneously, so hypnotic is Greder’s manipulation of the little red caboose, and his accomplished wrangling of the miniature props”. Seanna Van Helten, Rave Magazine

“Apart from anything else, All Aboard is an object lesson in the art of making a certain amount go a very long way”. James Harper, Courier Mail

“Such is the charm and humour that most audiences will find themselves easily drawn in”. James Harper, Courier Mail

“It is a masterful creation of two characters in the European circus tradition”.
Patricia Escalon, The Program

“Suddenly, the role of the audience becomes clear in a moment so ingenious in its simplicity that you almost feel a sense of foolhardiness for not seeing it earlier”. Kane Adrian, Australian Stage

Full reviews, interviews and previews continued over...

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)
By Lauren Anderson
'Arts Hub'
November 19, 2007

A man and his toy train

"Very rarely does the ambience of a performance seep out into the foyer of the theatre, establishing a rapport with the audience before their ticket has been ripped. But in Tom Greder's one man play, *All Aboard*, the viewers are won over before they even take their seats – in either First or Second Class apparently.

Described as 'Nietzsche meets Thomas the Tank Engine', *All Aboard* is a contemplative tale that sits somewhere between a Chaplin movie and a colourful children's pantomime. From the moment the 'conductor' character appeared at the top of the stairs to Metro Arts' Sue Benner Theatre, mumbling an incoherent train announcement into a toy megaphone, the prospective audience was grinning like a bunch of school kids prepared to go a long on a journey that could take them anywhere.

Greder's piece of theatre connects with that feeling a person experiences on a train; the pervading eeriness of a silent rocking carriage, the apparent loneliness of passengers and the thrill of departure or arrival on those longer trips where the destination might be unknown.

Anyone who has ever stood on the platform of a European train station will remember the delight and confusion of the constant commotion going on around you, and the nervous anticipation of whether you will actually board the right train. Within his silent scenes, Greder portrays these emotions and so much more.

While *All Aboard* is an unconventional piece of theatre, I have not seen something so original and so poignant for a long time. I am in awe of how one man can keep the attention of a room full of adults with the antics of a toy train on wooden tracks.

With simplistic stage design by Brisbane artist Jonathon Oxlade and lighting by Andrew Meadows, there were moments when *All Aboard* seems more like a moving art installation than a play. Regardless of how you want to label it, Greder had us transfixed the whole time, using audience interaction throughout the piece to keep us engaged and make us laugh.

Playing as part of Metro Arts Independents 2007 series, *All Aboard* can not be described well enough to capture its genius. It is simply a play that must be seen to be believed. Get on board before the season ends on December 1. And don't forget to keep your ticket handy..."

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Kane Adrian

'Australian Stage'

November 16, 2007

"A Train wreck. A life derailed. Stop this train - I want to get off. Railroad metaphors for life are ubiquitous in our day-to-day existence. What could a street act turned theatre performance, based solely on this ages-old concept, have to offer that audiences have never seen or that wouldn't appear nauseatingly clichéd ? Well, thankfully, Kellogg's had it right all along: the simple things in life are often the best.

Created, written and performed by Swiss-born artist **Tom Greder**, *All Aboard* begins with an elaborate take on the kind of audience interaction often seen in pre-show crowd entertainment at theme parks. In his role as a French (Swiss-German. Ed) speaking conductor in need of serious dental work, **Greder** directs audience members to their seats as the eerie smoke and sounds of an old train platform invite them into this simple yet effective world. Tickets are checked, classes are imposed and blank faces abound as the conductor shouts orders in his native tongue. A number of props are sprung on those lucky enough to have chosen the right seats and the seemingly random exploits are cut short as the train arrives - symbolically, of course - and the show proper begins.

Taking on the role of *Oskar* - a young man in a red chechia (fez - like) cap - **Greder** has a wonderfully convincing physicality as he moves about the stage as though he's on a bumpy train. Taking a seat to open a gift he's been carrying under his arm, he slowly reveals a series of small toys representing family, friends, religion and nature - most importantly - a battery-operated train set. Suddenly, the role of the audience becomes clear in a moment so ingenious in its simplicity that you almost feel a sense of foolhardiness for not seeing it earlier. All the while, **Greder** remains silent in his prompts and the audience becomes entirely natural. As the train begins its journey, the performance becomes nothing short of mesmerising.

Representing both the mundane and adventurous nature of life, the train moves about a small table, weaving around props as **Greder** skilfully ensures its continued journey. Not only is it a feat of pure physical dexterity, patience and swift thinking, it is a commendable skill whereby major significance is placed upon this otherwise inconsequential toy. The transfixed audience cannot help but sigh when the train momentarily derails and cheer as it overcomes the odd bump or seemingly impossible odds. A fun, communal sense of appreciation for all of life's ups and downs - from birth to death - can be felt throughout the room and, as the conductor reappears, audience participation reaches its peak for a light-hearted finale. Utterly hilarious, sweet and never failing to impress, **Greder's** show is as close to perfect as I've seen in quite some time.

Following a long journey around the world, *All Aboard* stops in Brisbane's Metro Arts centre until 1st of December."

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Alison Cotes

'Stagediary'

November 15 2007

"If you're looking for a Christmas show for all the family, from intellectually sophisticated parents to wide-eyed little train fanatics, Metro Arts has it for you in this surreal, baffling, childlike and utterly enchanting show by Swiss circus artist and clown Tom Greder.

It's about trains, but not quite as you might think at first, when you're shown to your seat by a buck-toothed conductor who mutters in a generic unintelligible mitteleurope accent while he decides whether you're a first-class (paper doily on the back of the seat) or third-class (ordinary old uncomfortable Metro Arts seat) passenger. Like so many German train conductors I have known and not loved, he behaves like a mini-Hitler, gesturing towards where you have to sit, ordering you to sit still, and making you put your ticket in his strange wooden machine which often doesn't let it go — and then you're in trouble.

It's audience participation with a vengeance, as tickets are examined, rejected and destroyed, people are made to change seats, and raucous laughter (Nick Backstrom, you should be ashamed of yourself!) is firmly silenced.

Oskar Conductor has amiable characteristics, too, mostly in the pack of flip-cards he carries on his belt and shows to members of the audience. Somehow he wordlessly manages to make us give out a sympathetic "Aaah!" when he pulls out the laminated picture of his mother, and people were crowding to the aisle to see what other cards he had to show, and to make the appropriate noises. It's just as well the Sue Benner Theatre is a small venue, for people right at the back and sitting close to the wall couldn't really see the tiny cards, and were at the risk of being excluded, especially as this segment of the show went for a full 15 minutes. As a dedicated theatre wall-flower myself, I was getting quite frustrated, although my position did save me from being involved in the action.

But Tom Greder is a pro who knows just when an audience has had enough, so after he'd handed out various noise-making devices like a moo-cow gadget, a tiny bell, a couple of blow-up hooters and a bird-call contraption, he segued effortlessly into a sad passenger with a battered suitcase and a wrapped parcel, looking for all the world like a post-war refugee, so that the mood changed and we were in the world of Sartre, Kafka and even Beckett, where there is indeed no exit from this confusing situation. The buck teeth disappeared, the costume changed and the hat morphed into a skull cap, and many people were close to tears, for it was all too close to the existential despair that those writers portray so exquisitely.

But then Tom the Existential Wanderer begins to open his package, for it's his birthday (we're all cued up to sing to him, and we do), and inside the tatty box is a tiny electric engine, and four pieces of wooden track, two curved and two straight, but not enough to make a completed track.

More potential disappointment and despair but, never daunted, Our Tom created his own version of playing trains that at last brought into use those strange bangs and whistles distributed among the audience ten minutes earlier. On a table he set up a little village comprising a railway station (train whistle), some trees (bird whistle), cow in a field, a church (bell) and a little house where the fat mother-doll stood (Aaah!).

And for the next 15 minutes he had that little train chugging along the inadequate tracks, but by rapidly disconnecting one piece and adding it to the other end, he made the exercise into a perpetual race between his ability to detach and re-attach a piece of track, and the speed of the train. In between he played a harmonica, read a paper and consulted a miniscule dictionary, and when the tracks seem to take over their own arrangement and go off the end of the table, he simply added the last one in space and kept the whole thing going in the air. And he didn't drop it once.

Quite apart from the brilliant circus-juggling skills involved in this balancing act, it had, for those who wanted it, a redemptive escape from existential doom-and-gloom, and proved the resilience of the human spirit.

A standing ovation, the first I've ever seen at Metro Arts, followed his retreat into the darkness, but it wasn't over yet, and we were treated to more audience participation as the eight bells-and-whistles accomplices were dragged up front, and made to stand in a straight line and perform their own tricks with the train and the aerial train tracks.

Just as Tom Greder used no words to communicate this most joyous experience, so I have no words to convey the glory of it all. Go and see it yourself, and take the kids — and, for once, make sure you sit near the front and in the aisle seats.”

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Seanna Van Helten

'Rave Magazine'

November 20, 2007

Do the locomotion. Tom Greder enacts a theatrical life journey in his comic piece All Aboard, as reviewed by Seanna Van Helten

“All Aboard closes this year's Independents season at Metro Arts, a diverse program of theatre that began with seven plays in seventy minutes in *Micro trip*, produced the documentary play *The Kursk* and the new musical-theatre piece *Of Our Own Volition*, and which saw the unprecedented box-office success of *The Reunion*. The last of this mixed bunch, *All Aboard*, created, written and performed by Tom Greder and directed by Scott Witt, is another characteristically unique piece of theatre, a testament to the Independents program's aims in producing original shows with a high creative calibre.

This is a curious play to describe. Upon entering the Sue Benner Theatre, the audience is greeted by an irascible train conductor, barking instructions in an incomprehensible blend of European languages as we take our seats. The toothy gent briskly warms up the audience with his antics, and orchestrates with the crowd a series of sound effects that will feature in the next part of the piece. Here, a young clown brings to life a microcosmic train journey, delighting in his creation of a miniature world through which the locomotive travels and, at the same time, settling into the rhythmic monotony of its movement.

All Aboard was developed for a theatre venue from its prior life as a street act, an evolution that is evident in Greder's impeccable comic timing, and in the way he deftly endears his audience to him. His clown (like most good clowns) is a bit of an eccentric, bewildered by the crowd before him. Clowns often act as foils to their audience,

revealing our own foibles more so than their own – the silly class arrangements of seating, for example, or the habits of train commuters. Greder is very entertaining, able to enact with his body the jostle of a crowded station, the rumbling wind tunnel of a platform, the passenger unsteadily finding a seat. He makes his juggling act with the train tracks look easy. In fact, the entire show passes by almost instantaneously, so hypnotic is Greder's manipulation of the little red caboose, and his accomplished wrangling of the miniature props.

The major aim of Greder's collaboration with director Witt, designer Jonathon Oxlade, lighting designer Andrew Meadows, and sound designer Chrischi Weber, was to find a reason for this clown to tell his story, and to keep the narrative on track (forgive me) for a theatre audience. It is easy to imagine how Greder could slow down passing crowds of real-life commuters in the streets, or in a buzzy festival context. In this longer theatre version, we see Greder's own experiences of rail travel and long waits at stations morph into his clown's lifelong fascination with trains.

It's simple narrative, but one which shares with the audience Greder's passion and complex philosophy of why we travel and, in particular, why we relate to the culture of trains. We often talk about aspects of life in terms of voyages, where the journey is half the fun, and the destination is where lovers meet, and so on. In part, *All Aboard* parodies this perceived affinity of travel and trains with the human condition. But Greder's piece is also an amusing reflection on the to-ing and fro-ing that characterises our lives. This is a quaint, enjoyable performance, rounding out a consummate season on independent Brisbane theatre."

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By James Harper

'Courier Mail'

November 26, 2007

Impressive and original storytelling

"With a ghost story (*Of Our Own Volition*), drama in the Russian navy (*Kursk*) and a surreal comedy (*Microtrip*), metro Arts local productions during 2007 have had a fair bit of quirky originality.

All Aboard, a sometimes nostalgic, sometimes vaguely ominous meditation on train journeys, is probably the most original and, although creator and performer Tom Greder spends much of his time in Europe, he also spent some of his formative years in Brisbane, so the local tag still applies.

Apart from anything else, *All Aboard* is an object lesson in the art of making a certain amount go a very long way. There may be a cast of only one, but who needs more actors when there's a whole audience available to fill things out at appropriate moments?

It's a highly successful piece of performer-audience interaction – particularly impressive considering Greder enlists helpers without speaking a word in English.

An introduction featuring an obstreperous ticket inspector, and his Swiss-German sense of humour, sets things up.

Andrew Meadow's clever lighting transforms the murky space of Metro Arts Sue Benner Theatre into a mind's-eye vision of a cavernous railway station as Greder's character, part clown, part child, part pilgrim goes on his travels.

The bustle and alienation of the station scene dissolves into gentle childhood nostalgia as he performs a kind of slow table-top juggle, or object manipulation as the program notes put it, involving a toy train.

With the aid of some plastic scenery, an incomplete track and the previously arranged audience participation, the miniature locomotive traverses a bucolic European landscape, then the great plains of the Wild West.

Although the show has its origins in street theatre, much of it is quiet and intimate. There are no spectacular stunts and the show requires a bit of concentration.

Such is the charm and humour that most audiences will find themselves easily drawn in".

TOP FIVE PERFORMANCE PIECES LISTING 'SCENE MAGAZINE':

All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Cate Brown

'Scene Magazine'

December 19, 2007

"Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant ! This piece of work probably had the lowest budget and was performed in the smallest theatre featured in my top 5, but was my stand out favourite. Sad, beautiful and honest, Tom Greder's script and performance was restrained whilst exploring the gamut of human emotion".

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Patricia Escalon

'The Program'

November 20, 2007

Tom Greder proves that action is far more important on stage than dialogue.

"**Greder** recruits members of the audience to create sound effects for the performance. Dressed as a buck-toothed train conductor, he hands out a cow bell, a bird-twitter, a camera clicker and a train horn, giving cues for each sound. He enlists the entire audience to moo like a cow and sigh "Mama!" His instructions are delivered in a thick Swiss-German dialect.

Lighting designer Andrew Meadows and stage manager Rachel Butler assist **Greder** in suspending our disbelief. A spotlight opens the scene, shining on a young farmer as he waits on a platform for his train. The sounds of train horns, bustling passengers, cargo moving and loudspeakers evoke an eighteenth century Swiss station. As the express whizzes by, the lights flash intermittently, and **Greder** follows the reflections from the windows of the train with his head.

The dining car is simulated by a table onto which **Greder** places figurines: a church, a house, the character's mother, a cow. He opens a birthday present, which contains a return ticket, wooden train tracks, a little train station and a locomotive. He builds a half moon track and sets the train in motion. As it reaches the end of the tracks, **Greder** grabs the first section and places it after the last, ensuring an entropy which will carry hi through the narrative.

As the little locomotive traverses Europe, he changes landscapes by using less and less figurines. He uses postcards for the Tower of Pisa or Luxor. During the excitement of a train hijack in the Wild West, he receives sad news and returns to Switzerland only to find his mother dead. His grief is palpable as he bangs his head on the table once, rests for a moment and inhaling deeply, begins to don the conductor's costume.

As an epilogue, the conductor thanks everyone who assisted in the performance. He calls all the sound makers onto the stage, asking them to create a never-ending train journey with only their hands supporting the tracks. The play ends when the train arrives at the station after many stops and starts.

All Aboard goes by incredibly fast, despite **Greder** dwelling on the train journey too long. It is a masterful creation of two characters in the European circus tradition. By revisiting mime, **Greder** upstages conventional playwrights without sacrificing narrative.

Do yourself a favour. Put your bum on a seat at Metro Arts. You will not regret it."

REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)
By K.M. Grownow
'Meap Careers'
November 2007

This was always going to be an ambitious endeavour: a one-man show with minimal set, lots of audience interaction and no English spoken. However, creator/writer/performer Tom Greder, and dramaturg/director Scott Witt have managed it brilliantly.

All Aboard is a sometimes awkward, sometimes enlightening, and always entertaining exploration of the simple connections we share as humans. Using classic clowning techniques, Greder takes us on a journey in more ways than one, as he shares the life story of his train conductor character Oskar from childhood to adulthood.

The show starts in the foyer as whistles are blown and indecipherable utterings come forth from a small tinny speaker; true railway style. He then lets the audience into the theatre, or train, and greets all who enter. A lengthy session of audience participation follows with tickets collected and audience players chosen and unwittingly initiated for their roles later in the show.

The jovial Oskar speaks a mixture of languages (none of them English) in the style of clown gibberish, which some audience members struggle to comprehend, and others laughing at their confusion. Delightful play with a train set and other props follows as we share the character's journey through life and learn his motivations.

Greder's finely-tuned mastery of physical expression is to be commended as he brings a long train journey to life effectively using little more than his own body. My own physical and emotional memories of long-haul journeys in other countries were instantly stirred. The cycle of life is poignantly illustrated using a simple and subtle representation that inspires a powerful emotional relationship with the character.

There were times, however, when particular aspects continued for too long which lessened the established connection. However, overall, I found this to be a beautiful display of clowning at its best, showing us both the innocence and wisdom we all possess, and the simple beauty of life itself. As a big fan of clowning performance, Greder's portrayal reinforced my belief in the power of clowns to connect with the emotions of the audience through simple gestures and expressions, and innocent play.

RADIO REVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Eric Scott

'Radio 4EB'

November 15, 2007

"All it needs is a couple of clowns to make people laugh – and when they are of the calibre of Swiss-born **Tom Greder** and Brisbane-born **Scott Witt** working together, you are on the way to a hit. *All Aboard* is a short, sweet and hilarious journey performed by Tom Greder and directed by Scott Witt.

All Aboard, another success story from the Metro Arts Independents program, is a one man clown show in the modern tradition. Tom Greder took us through a crazy train journey that had the audience hooting with laughter.

It's not often that critics get dragged into a performance, but on pening night yours truly, who went along to review *All Aboard* at the Metro Arts, ended up being part of the show, along with half a dozen or so other audience members. I'm not sure hwo enjoyed it more, those left in the audience or us silly people on stage.

As we entered the Sue Benner Theatre Greder was at the entrance dressed as an officious station master and speaking in a sort of Swiss-German gobbledegook. He checked tickets and sent people to sit down; some of whom were lucky and were directed to First Class, seats at the front with little doilies on the back.

This little 85 minute show proved to be a mighty gem.

When he had people settled – and that settling included moving people from first to second class with proper chastisement – Greder began to work the audience in true clown fashion with mime, unintelligible speaking and lots of sight gags. He got people involved by showing them a series of cards with characters pictured on them and then he handed out toys, a bell, a whistle or two, arrows – I ended up with a pair of cowboy guns.

He had us in stitches with amazing facials and body language. Then, seemingly satisfied he left us in the dark only to re-emerge as a traveller on a train station. Gone was the domineering thin controller and in is place a beanie-headed timid man with a battered suitcase and a badly wrapped present.

Then along with the soundtrack designed by Chrischi Weber, he stood on the platform, jumping as trains whizzed by until eventually he climbed on board the imaginary train, and rocking with the rhythm of movement, took us to his destination. He went to a birthday party and unpacked his present, which was filled with model buildings, wooden train tracks – and a toy train. It was then that Greder showed more of his magic.

He introduced buildings and characters to a small table top as the toy train began a never-ending journey round the track. The thing was, the track wasn't complete, so Greder kept moving tracks from the back to the front to keep the train moving.

He brought the audience back into play, ringing bells, making cow noises, yelling as they had a good time in an imaginary pub. My cowboys came out and I had to shoot at the Indians. The entire audience had a great time watching the manipulation of the toy train and joining in the fun.

Finally, as the train reached the end of its journey and arrived at the station, the traveller changed slowly back into the station master and began collecting the toys he handed out at the beginning of the show – but we all hit a snag. We had to take them to the stage and put them into his bag. Once there, he kept us, lines us up in a precise line, handed out the rail tracks and the train at one end of the line and left a guy holding the station at the other. Yep, we had to keep moving those little tracks until we got the train to the station.

Well, what a load of geese we were, but we helped keep the others amused. This was a quality show – just look at the crew. Greder was directed by fellow clown, actor, writer Scott Witt, Jonathon Oxlade did the design, and Andrew Meadows did the lighting. It's a great show – and top price tickets only cost \$20. Its on until December 1."

PREVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)
'City South News'
November 15, 2007

Train journeys form show

"A love affair with trains spanning more than three decades has led to an Annerley man's 20th international tour. *All Aboard* is the latest offering by Tom Greder, a writer who divides his time between Annerley and his birth country Switzerland.

Greder takes the audience on a poetic and hilarious voyage into the great unknown, drawing a comic parallel between the joy and despair of train journeys and life itself. "Trains have been a part of my childhood growing up in Switzerland...when you are on a train platform your imagination and reality merge," the 42 year old said. "This piece is essentially about the series of arrivals and departures that dot our lives and the choices that connect them". Greder trained as a circus artist and contemporary clown. His theatre show *All Aboard* will make its debut in Brisbane before embarking an international tour."

Interview: Tom Greder
By Cate Brown
'Scene Magazine'
November 21, 2007

A Life less ordinary

Travel broadens the mind, opens the heart and nourishes the soul

"All Aboard by Tom Greder, is an ode to travel, most particularly time spent on trains and train stations, where a traveller sits, often alone, reflecting on life, and experiencing the journey.

'All Aboard, a solo show which Greder both wrote and performs in, is a reflection on a life of travel. Born in Switzerland, he immigrated to Australia when he was six, 'travelling's been in me ever since (immigrating to Australia); I always knew the world was round". And since this point he has led a somewhat nomadic existence, "I always say: I'm based in Switzerland, I'm based in Australia, and I'm based half-way in between".

From a young age, Greder has been interested in the physical. "I love the physical stuff, but I hate the competitive stuff of sports". When he was young his mother learned of his interest and bought tickets for them to go and see American juggling and comedy group 'The Flying Karamazov brothers'. Twenty minutes into the show the angel sung, the lightbulb shon...ever since then it's been that way for me."

Twenty years ago this passion for physical theatre was something of a problem for Greder. There was a real lack of opportunities for him to learn about his art form in Australia. So, by making and selling juggling balls he made enough money to go to Europe and learn his practice. Training in London at The Circus Space and Ecole Philippe Gaulier, he developed skills as a circus artist and contemporary clown, and has created an amazing career for himself working across genres of circus, cabaret, dance, and street theatre.

In 1995 Greder wrote and performed his first solo theatre piece called 'Mondays', and - like his current production - this was picked up by Metro Arts. On 'Mondays' he worked with director Scott Witt, and lighting designer Andrew Meadows, both of whom have worked with him again on 'All Aboard'. "Working together again has created a full-circle feel to this production. I love it"

Following the season at Metro Arts 'All Aboard' will be performed as a street theatre piece at the Woodford Folk Festival and the Western Australian Circus Festival. Then Greder will jet off overseas to perform in Japan, France, Brazil, and then who knows what's next for this seasoned performer (and traveller)."

PREVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Toni Bartlett

'Time Off'

November 14, 2007

Rail life stories. Tom Greder enacts a theatrical life journey in his comic piece All Aboard

"I think audiences will be a little bit challenged, but I think they'll also release a lot with the show – it's pushing certain boundaries, but they're boundaries I think audiences in Australia are ready to go for."

Swiss-born, Brisbane-bred writer and performer Tom Greder is talking about *All Aboard* – a performance piece he's been developing for the last six years, from physical street theatre and cabaret incarnations in Europe, through to what is now a polished one-man show debuting at Metro Arts this week.

Drawing on a range of styles and influences from circus and puppetry to film and dance, *All Aboard* sounds like a combination of comic playfulness and poetic rumination – one that Greder hopes will "dare I say it – set a new benchmark and just lift audience expectations for intimate theatre in the future."

Ambitious stuff, yes. But why not? The thoughtful, articulate Greder might just have the smarts to carry it off. Certainly he's got a dream team of creatives behind him in the form of director Scott Witt, designer Jonathon Oxlade and lighting designer Andrew Meadows. A pool of collective talent like this can't help but inspire confidence. But what exactly is *All Aboard* all about?

"Thomas the Tank Engine meets Nietzsche," Greder says. Okay, sold.

"It caters for both of these things," Greder continues. "It's about play, it's about the journey of life, it's about playing with that journey, but it's also about the struggles that we have *in* playing, in *staying* playing with it – all of us just stop playing basically."

The way that Greder has chosen to explore these notions of play and stasis – life and death, if you like – is through the metaphor of the train and "stations, stations in life". Tackling these themes at a train-like pace – 'you keep things moving along and let people have little grabs of images' – is also part of the plan. But why the attraction to the ways of the rail?

"One of my fascinations – not just as someone who's spent 20 years travelling around on a lot of trains, waiting at stations, but also as an immigrant kid – is with train stations as points of departure and arrival," Greder says. "The train station for me is such a wonderful place. It's eerie, it's exciting, it fills you with fear – it's like a no man's land. You've gone but you haven't left yet; you've arrived, but you haven't come yet. I really love the lonesomeness of train stations as well.

"(*All Aboard*) is really an attempt to reflect on what's happened to me over the last 20 years of travelling the globe, feeling lost in the wonderful madness of the world. It's a metaphor, a parable, a story – it's a message. An homage to 20 years of dramaturgical research really!"

With plans to tour the show in Japan, Brazil and the south of France in 2008, you'd do well to catch *All Aboard* before it goes abroad. After all, as Greder says, "when you do a show that speaks about the human condition, you do appeal to everyone."

PREVIEW: All Aboard, Metro Arts (Brisbane)

By Tonya Turner

'Courier Mail'

November 20, 2007

Ideas above is station

Hanging around railway stations as a child put this artist on track, writes Tonya Turner

"It was an easy choice deciding between circus and sports for Tom Greder. After completing a degree in Human Movement Studies at university and road testing a career in high school physical education, Greder was still waiting for something to click. It finally happened when an overseas juggling troupe came to Brisbane and took his breath away.

"I had that moment of true inspiration and knew that was the path forward. I just didn't like the competitive nature of that whole industry of sports, but I loved the physicality, and circus and physical theatre is a wonderful combination of my interests," Greder, 42, says.

In the final show of Metro Arts Independents 2007 season, Greder performs his one-man show, *All Aboard*.

Using clowning skills, physical theatre, object manipulation and live music, his story draws on years of travel experiences waiting for trains to unknown destinations.

"As a child and in the past 20 years I've spent so much time in train stations and I started becoming aware that I actually really love them. They're this no-man's land. You've left but you haven't gone anywhere yet, or you've arrived but you haven't gotten anywhere yet. They're a melting pot, they're eerie, they're exciting, they're thrilling but also fill you with fear. It's a place that's very metaphorical for the journey of life itself", he says.

Born in Switzerland, Greder arrived in Australia when he was aged six. After graduating from university and deciding on his creative career path, he felt the time was right to return to Europe. "At the time it was very difficult to get any circus training in Australia. There was such a huge and long tradition and history of street theatre, circus and all of the performing arts in Europe," he says. Based in Biel, Switzerland, he now divides his time between teaching and touring shows through Europe and performing and teaching his newfound skills in Australia.

The show, which will tour to Woodford Folk Festival and WA Circus Festival before heading to Brazil, Japan and Europe, has allowed Greder to take his performing skills to a new level. "I was a juggler working with plastic objects, and I got to the point in my life where I thought there's more to life than throwing plastic objects around in the air. Looked for a way of adapting the physical skills that I had to object manipulation, so instead of juggling balls, it became a toy locomotive, and for me that had a lot more metaphorical substance. It's hard to endow a plastic ball with emotional content. It's a lot easier to do that with a toy train," he says."