

# Varla Jean Merman Is Anatomically Incorrect

Sydney Opera House Studio

24 – 28 April

Review of performance on 24th April 8.15pm for Lush Magazine

If Varla Jean Merman wasn't a mere slip of a gal it would be easy to assume that both Debbie Reynolds and Rhonda Burchmore had studied carefully and 'borrowed' aspects of her performance for their own. In this new show Varla Jean (aka Jeffery Roberson) returns to the Opera House Studio and invites us to 'fasten our seatbelts and boldly go where 4,792 men, 12 women and 1 Alsatian have boldly gone before' – her body.

The self proclaimed love child of Ethel "I take a breath when I need too" Merman and Ernest Borgnine, Varla Jean leads us on a body-part themed performance of songs and film clips, that mock plastic surgery, foot fetishism (podophilia) and breast obsession. In a delightfully un-nuanced performance Merman crash tackles the audience from her 'big opening' and keeps them in the palm of her hand through the 1hour 15 minute performance that doesn't let up the whole way through. The songs are quick paced (Pussycat Dolls, Cher and Blackeyed Peas get the treatment) The delivery is rapid fire and the adlibs carefully scripted. If you miss a joke don't worry there'll be another one along in about 3.5 seconds (I lost 100 pounds 2 years ago – of course it's only 60 now). The audience is with her all the way. This is flawless Cabaret in the old school style

But it's the voice that brings it all together. It soars when it has too, from a great performance of 'Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix' that segues nicely into 'Don't cha' (accompanied by Tenor Mark Cortale) to the odd 'ballsy' note that reminds us that this trained mezzo soprano is Jeffery Roberson and Varla Jean Merman is indeed Anatomically Incorrect.

Written by Chris Surplice