

# STAGENOISE

with Diana Simmonds

## LYING CHEATING BASTARD

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*There's no such thing as easy money*

**Lying Cheating Bastard**, Soft Tread Enterprises in association with Tamarama Rock Surfers at the Old Fitzroy Hotel, July 2-25; <http://www.rocksurfers.org/>

**JAMES GALEA** is gorgeous to look at and charming in a twinkly, **provocative** way. It means that when he looks you (the audience) in the eye, grins and says he's about to **cheat** you out of the contents of your wallet and there's nothing you can do about it, you believe him. More than that, however, it's almost impossible to resist the impulse to take out the wallet, open it and **simper** pathetically, "Help yourself."



Galea and his script collaborator and director **Nicolas Hammond** have conspired to demonstrate how a lying, cheating bastard can be at once **irresistible** and repellent, honest and dishonest, sensitive and ruthless, **funny** and shocking. In the end they hold up a (metaphorical) mirror to us - the **victims** - to show us just how responsible we are for allowing ourselves to be conned, fleeced, **gulled**, duped, bled, diddled and - well, it's embarrassing to discover how many words there are to describe the act of being helplessly greedy.

*Lying Cheating Bastard* is a **one-man** show for a consummate card sharp and magician, which is Galea's day job, so to speak. It tells the story of how a lad first figures out how to get the better of a **sideshow alley filmflam** man: he cheats the cheat. It then follows the education of the fatherless boy by his older mentor, a professional **poker** player, through the seamy then increasingly glamorous world of big games, **high rollers** and high living.

Interwoven through the story are a series of increasingly **astounding** tricks and demonstrations of sleight of hand that are impossible to fathom even as Galea virtually shows and tells how he's doing them. It's a **masterful** performance and as he begins it with a devastating smile and the warning, "Everything I tell you is **the truth**, maybe," it's equally impossible to tell where the Galea story begins and ends and where **theatrical** licence takes over.

Wherever the join is, it's hard to detect, what ensues in two acts, is a trajectory that ends the first half on an unexpected **cliff-hanger** and the final reckoning is a harsh dose of reality. *Lying Cheating Bastard* lies somewhere between theatre and cabaret and is hugely entertaining. **Jo Briscoe's** glitzy casino-edgy apartment set and **Matt Marshall's** lighting have transformed the Fitzroy space beyond recognition, while **Steve Francis** adds a crucial dimension with the sound design to sketch in the otherwise invisible crowds and life of the gambling milieu.

As I'm still waiting for someone to explain to me how a magician managed to make a **bloody great** goose disappear from a box on a card table right in front of me, I am a sucker for great **tricks**. But more than that, I'm a sucker for unpretentious and honest entertainment - albeit the best (worst?) trickery I've ever seen - since the goose, that is. **Wonderful fun**, scary educational and with a moral sting in its cute tail.