

# Sophia Simmons on science fiction and self-discovery

MARCH 6, 2019 by DAVID KNIGHT

With two science fiction-themed works to premiere in Adelaide this year, local playwright and actor Sophia Simmons is a theatre talent on the rise.

Now based in Melbourne, Simmons will return to Adelaide for two premieres in 2019, the first of which, *Gravity Guts*, will see her perform the solo piece in Tandanya for Fringe before returning in October to star in another original piece, *Limit*, which is this year's State Umbrella work for State Theatre Company of South Australia.

Simmons' semi-autobiographical *Gravity Guts*, which was the winner of the 2018 Pioneer Playwright Award, is a comedy about a Sigourney Weaver fan who wants to go to space but realises her lack of maths skills means that that astronaut goal is unlikely.

"It's really an examination of a girl who's trying to follow her dreams but she's also trying to distract herself from what's going on back at home and back on earth," Simmons says of the work that has *Mighty Boosh* touches of surreal playful humour. "It arises that something is going on with her dad, and he has a problem with drinking, so you watch that journey as well that of her finding her voice and standing up to him."

After graduating from Adelaide College of Arts, Simmons relocated to Melbourne to complete her Masters in Writing for Performance at Victoria College of Arts (VCA). *Gravity Guts* is to be directed by her VCA peer Milly Cooper.

"I wanted to make a show I could perform and that I could potentially take to Fringe but I wasn't completely sold on that, I was really open to whatever I discovered," she says of the writing process. "It just worked out as I investigated my own writing drive that it then fed into this work and why I'm interested in science fiction. All the work I kept trying to write through the [VCA] course kept on having some sort of science fiction bent: 'Why do I keep on doing this?'" she laughs. "That self-discovery led to this work where I kind of leaned into that and this piece was born."



## THE ADELAIDE R E V I E W



When asked why her work has a science fiction lean, Simmons answers that sci-fi allows us to look out to the universe as well as inward.

"It's this perfect intersection between creativity and science, which I think is a creative act in itself, and bigger philosophical questions. It encapsulates all these amazing ideas and lends itself to imagining a different future."

Even though both *Gravity Guts* and *Limit* have sci-fi themes, she doesn't view them as companion pieces.

"They are very different pieces, actually. I wrote *Limit* first and that took me longer to write. That was a project I developed over several years because I was trying to find my voice as a writer. I wrote this piece about a character going to Mars and it had a lot of potential but my writing wasn't as strong."

After figuring out what she was trying to say, Simmons was able to turn *Limit* into something she's proud of, with the script capturing the attention of State Theatre as they selected it to be 2019's State Umbrella work, where they present and support the production of an independent piece.

"It's a drama that looks at what happens when people are put under pressure in a confined space and travel further and further away from earth," Simmons says. "It questions what we bring as a species; if we are going to go out and colonise and what we can leave behind."

Although she now lives in Melbourne, Simmons still calls Adelaide home.

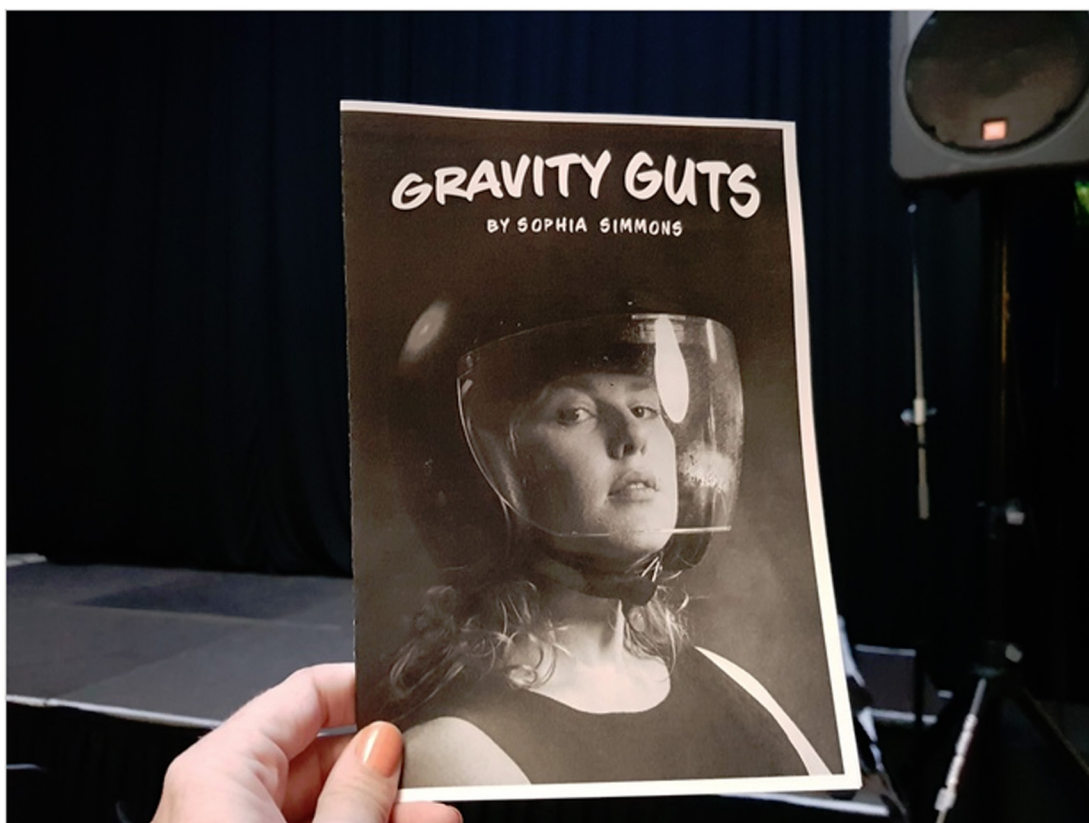
"I still feel like a South Australian artist, all my work is premiering there, and that is really important," Simmons says. "I think I will come back to Adelaide eventually, but I really want to be challenged, grow and be the best artist I can be. Part of that is going into a bigger pool and being exposed to what is happening on a national scale, being inspired by that and then bringing that back and adding that to what's happening in Adelaide."

# Weekend NOTES

## Gravity Guts - Adelaide Fringe

Event: 06/03/2019 - 17/03/2019

What does it take to reach the stars?



Sophia Simmons in Gravity Guts

[large image](#)

What starts as a seemingly simple tale about a young woman's love of space, *Gravity Guts* soon turns to much deeper conversation.

Sophia Simmons (writer and performer) takes to the stage to tell her own story. A love affair with all things out of space, and Aliens era Sigourney Weaver, Sophia is both comical and sincere as she tells her story of growing up. Referencing a father she seemingly idolises as her main influence in wanting to be an astronaut, the audience soon learns that Sophia's Dad is perhaps not the idol she makes him out to be, as we hear of a teenaged girl's struggle to live with an alcoholic father who doesn't believe in himself, or her.

Sophia Simmons is excellent on stage. With only a box of props to interact with, she's an engaging storyteller and has you feeling, laughing, and wanting more.

*Gravity Guts* is showing at Tandanya Arts Cafe for Adelaide Fringe.

Sophia's love affair with space can continue to be explored with her next show, *Limit*, a State Theatre Umbrella show, at Bakehouse Theatre from Oct 24 - Nov 9 2019.



by Dani T

Food. Travel. Fun. Adelaide.



Gravity Guts ★★★★★



Adelaide Fringe. Wielding Theatre. 8 Mar 2019

*Gravity Guts* takes this enormous thing called the universe, in which we all feel as an inestimable, inadequate, barely-there grain of nothing, and turns that on its head.

In an endearingly direct, highly sophisticated comic performance, playwright/actor Sophia Simmons' early teenage character Sophia eagerly showers us with tales, knowledge and enthusiasm for space.

This witty, delightfully cheeky being sparks laughter with astonishing ease. Sophia is a child possessing an extraordinary ability to see the universe from pre Big Bang to now, with a hook into humanity that makes a warm, comprehensible connection between us all and the great unknown.

There is a purpose to this, one in which the singular power of Simmons' writing, supported by the finest direction of a solo work seen in some time from Milly Cooper, offers a big emotional turn to the work.

Sophia's family life is not an easy one. It has turmoil and stresses, which find themselves intertwined and expressed through the seeming chaotic order of forces governing the universe.

With utmost ease and extremely precise craft, Simmons and Cooper's production becomes an extraordinary, deeply affecting meditation on the space between hearts and minds more fully considered and understood in light of the awe that is endless space; all it contains.

*Gravity Guts* is a remarkable achievement as theatre for all ages. Simmons, originally from Adelaide, has built well on the promise shown when winning Flinders University Young Playwright Award (2013), then Pioneer Playwright Award (2018).

David O'Brien  
5 Stars

When: 6 to 10 Mar  
Where: Tandanya, Live From Channel 9, Tandanya Arts Café  
Bookings: [adelaidefringe.com.au](http://adelaidefringe.com.au)

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