

The Merinos at the Silo Theatre

By SUSAN BUDD

Stealing unashamedly from television's *The Sopranos*, Jon Stubbs presents a galaxy of mafiosi bent on stealing a merino sheep from the high country somewhere near Lumsden.

Vinnie Tagliatelli is the hood chosen for the job by one Nicky Fasthands Bambina, a barber as terrifying, in a quiet way, as *Sweeney Todd*.

The New York family are threatened by the sartorial elegance of the Ferrari family from Iowa. Their leading light, Mike, wears an Italian suit of soft, warm and light merino wool and honour demands the same for the barber.

Stubbs makes no modish claims himself. A big man in track pants, he contorts his smooth face into expressions from evil to subnormal.

Tagliatelli has a certain cool, with eyes permanently at half mast and a relaxed swagger.

His ancient mother is the ultimate cackling and threatening crone addicted to Jerry Springer.

The rest of the clan range from a floor-sweeping midget to an intellectually challenged sidekick.

He rings the changes without evident strain, performing comic duos and even trios in a totally relaxed manner.

The characters become even stranger once Vinnie hits Lumsden. Raewyn, a giggling and preening maid of all work, is unfairly afflicted with both false teeth and an artificial leg and Barry down on the farm has all his limbs, but not his faculties.

In a strange touch of realism, only the jolly farmer seems normal.

Director John Palino is innovative in his use of tall boxes, turned to represent changes of scene. They are

simple and effective, as is his clear direction.

Stubbs does not attempt total accuracy in his representations, but approximates the Bronx accents of the mob with constant descents into pure kiwi nasality. He is very funny and charmingly eccentric.

Copyright ©2008, APN Holdings NZ Limited