The Adelaide Cabaret Festival, in part, arose from the need to separate from the avalanche of stand-up comedy that dominates the Fringe. However, there has been no shortage of funny business in the Festival Centre recently in a program that has included the CNNNN jokers, Sandman and Flacco, Wil Anderson - and Bob Downe.

Even after twenty one years, it seems, you can’t keep an irrepressible man down. Bob Downe, the acrylic and polyester alter ego of Mark Trevorrow, has - you might say - come of age. But he hasn’t quite arrived either because he belongs in a long and hilarious line of repressed entertainers, those, like Norman Gunston, whose vaulting ambitious outweigh their talents, and whose geek-detectors are permanently switched off.

Brilliantly sending up the iPod craze (and ever going back to the future that is the seventies) Bob’s promo photo sports an oversize white beatbox complete with earmuff headphones. On stage he is elegant in neckerchief, navy blazer and houndstooth checks. A model of fine grooming, Mr Downe’s hair is so perfect it is hard to believe it is real. As for his fabulous vocals, bringing alive such classics as *I Can’t Take My Eyes off You*, *Something Stupid* and *Love is in the Air*, he uncannily conjures up the big cheeses of the 1970s - Manilow, Tony Orlando and John Paul Young. He even holds his own with a real karaoke star, Australian Idol finalist Emelia Rusciano who plays Barbra to his Neil for *You Don’t Bring Me Flowers*.

Bob shows his family photo albums and shares memories of his 21 year show biz career while adoring fans singalong to their favourites. Bob does interviews, receives video tributes from Rove, Bert and Kerri-Anne, repeatedly demonstrates his convulsive dance moves and introduces a kind of crooning that might be called tooth singing. It is a performance that
must be seen to be believed, Mr Downe has made recycling into an art form.

Much like the Kransky Sisters from Esk in Queensland who have also brought a special kind of music to the Cabaret Festival. With their matching black hair and spotted blouses, Mourne, Eva and Arva (aka Annie Lee, Christine Johnston and Michele Watt) unpack a shopping trolley full of instruments - tuba, reed organ, guitar and - a sight for the eyes - a carpenter’s saw and bow. The sisters bring rich anecdotes from Esk, of its many retail amenities and the newsagent magazines they like to read.

As they play an eclectic range of songs - *We Don’t Need No Education, Pretty Woman, Nutbush City Limits* and others - we glimpse life’s disappointments for the Kranskys, especially for Arva, all but ostracised by her half-sisters, although Eva noticeably perked up when Neil, a guest from the audience, joined the trio to play the triangle. They have an admirably demure manner, these sisters, and a deadpan approach to their music and humour that has the audience in almost continuous, if subdued, mirth.

*The Big Con*, the newest show from Max Gillies, writer Guy Rundle, and performer Eddie Perfect is a very different cup of teehee. Reminding us that satire without the balm of playful comedy can sometimes be an abrasive experience, Gillies and Perfect deliver a double-barrelled report from their CIA - the Centre for Independent Analysis. Primed by Eddie Perfect at the piano, belting out the show’s theme song, we turn to a sequence of Gillies targets. Alan Jones opens the batting and gets a belting, Bob Carr appears by video link - Roman in pose and classical in erudition, David Flint and Arnold the Governator also follow. Eddie comes out punching with a song on gay marriage that is as graphic as it is witty while Gillies returns as Rupert Murdoch in Chinese mode, the revisionist historian Keith Windschuttle and a globally challenged Alexander Downer.

To its credit the somewhat elderly audience does not, at the interval, take to its collective bath chair and escape. Instead, Max does Bush and Blair, and Eddie a song sardonically titled *You are so September 10*. The refugee issue is seriously lampooned by Gillies as a ghoulishly motled Phillip Ruddock and Amanda Vanstone, sprawled on the piano singing about *Amandatory Detention*. Guy Rundle’s text is both withering and funny, Gillies’ delivery and versatility as virtuosic as ever. And Eddie Perfect is a revelation - like Joe Jackson playing Tom Lehrer with a slap of Brett Easton Ellis thrown in. Max Gillies presents an acerbic portrait of the PM, but Perfect, blithely warbling a song called *John Howard’s Bitches*, ratchets up
the danger and confrontation even further. Gillies has done a brave thing teaming up with Angry Eddie, but he also knows that satire can never set up its tent where there is no chance of a storm.