

AUSTRALIAN STAGE Elegies: A Song Cycle | SINGular & Six Foot Something Friday, 28 November 2008

Written by Stephanie Johnson

Elegies: A Song Cycle is small musical theatre, not small in the sense of insignificant or lacking size, but rather in the sense of modest and unpretentious. Herein lies its beauty.

As the title suggests, lyricist and composer William Finn has interlaced a series of songs each written in response to death. A New Yorker, he completed his series of short stories in song after the September 11 tragedy.

The songs do not link to tell an overall story, but rather each one tells its own tale lamenting the loss of loved ones. The music is hauntingly similar throughout, but the lyrics and style differ. Some fondly and humorously recall loved ones' oddities, others mourn the futility of death and yet others are heart wrenchingly sad exposes of personal grief.

Director David Lampard has gathered a strong ensemble of singers and has designed a charming autumnal setting to accentuate both the beauty and the simplicity of the music and the lyrics. He has also used a multi-media screen as a backdrop, which is in some ways is superfluous as the quality of the lyrics speaks for itself.

Musical Director Timothy Sexton has ensured that the music and sound is top quality and pianist Dale Ringland is to be applauded for his 90-minutes of musical expertise.

Those familiar with the talents of regular Adelaide artists Adam Goodburn, Mark Oates and Paul Talbot are unlikely to be surprised by the high quality of these performances.

Talbot excels at the quirky and amusing odes to odd friends with numbers such as "Fred" and "My Dogs" and yet he also is able to expressively vocalise one of most emotion-packed songs about the death of Finn's mother in "When The Earth Stopped Turning".

Oates' timely rendition of "Marks All-Male Thanksgiving" is warm and tender, and Goodburn's "Joe Papp" (with Talbot and Oates) is a highlight.

Elizabeth Campbell and Cherie Boogaart are a delightful duo dishing up a lighter moment in "Dear Reader" and Boogaart's "Passover" is not to be passed over.

Nevertheless it is numbers such as Boogaart's "Anytime (I Am There)" and the ensemble's "Saying My Goodbyes" that provide some of the most poignant and unifying moments. These numbers are performed brilliantly both technically and emotionally. It is here that the talents of Lampard, Sexton and the ensemble meld to produce astonishing quality and big emotions from modest musical theatre.

If you believe that good things come in small packages and you are up for ninety minutes of music about loss and love then take a tissue or two to this testament to the power of love and the unifying force of death.

