



## The Will To Be

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

Mark Salvestro & BCauseARTS. Bakehouse Theatre.

Written and performed by Mark Salvestro, *The Will To Be* is a touching story of self-discovery. It is about a university English literature lecturer named William O'Halloran who has lost his job because he is having an affair with a student whom he is assisting to prepare for a role in a student production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1962 – as now – an affair between a teacher and a student is a 'no-no'. But it's worse than that. The student is male, and in the 1960s homosexual activity is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment. William is spared that. He is simply 'let go' from his university post, which, according to his termination letter, is "an act of mercy" in deference to the esteem in which he is otherwise held.

Roll the clock forward to right now and Sydney's Mardi Gras is celebrating gay pride for the whole world to see. Despite such public celebrations, members of the LGBTIQ community still confront prejudice and difficulties sometimes unwittingly aided and abetted by government actions. Pride is about knowing one's self worth. It's about confronting one's vulnerabilities and having the courage to be one's true self despite the obstacles.

This is exactly what William O'Halloran ultimately does, but even now, as then, it takes enormous courage.

In a fifty minute long spell-binding solo performance, Mark Salvestro is William O'Halloran.

The story telling and acting is exquisite. We feel his nervousness, his pain, and his excitement. Having just been dismissed, William is packing up his office and he speaks directly to the audience and invites us 'in' to his world. He explains how the affair started, his initial resistance, and the subsequent moments of self-discovery. There are flashbacks to his own student days and to when he first met his wife, to him 'coming out' to his wife, and to him making love with Henry, the student he is coaching. We are never in doubt as to what time period we are in – the text does that beautifully – and there are attempts to make it clearer through lighting changes, but they are unnecessary. Salvestro makes it crystal clear where we are: a slight shift of his body, the set of his head, a perfectly-timed and executed change of gesture.

William is a repressed man, and he is anxious. He doesn't really know himself and Salvestro exquisitely portrays William's hesitancy and nervousness. Words cannot really do justice to his stagecraft. One almost aches – sharing William's pain – while watching Salvestro's performance

Highly recommended.

Kym Clayton