

## Brilliant Traces



By Cindy Lou Johnson. Joh Hartog Productions. Bakehouse Theatre. September 25th – October 5th, 2019

Written by Cindy Lou Johnson, *Brilliant Traces* is a two hander, performed very ably by Krystal Brock as Rosannah DeLuce and Brendan Cooney as Henrey Harry.

The setting is an isolated, sparse log cabin in the state of Alaska, placed in the middle of nowhere. Cleverly, a combustion stove gently belches smoke, warming the room whilst the wind howls throughout the performance, transporting us into what is metaphorically and really, the 'eye of a storm'. Snow is piled against the cabin, the doors and windows. It is an isolating 'white out' and the stark reality of this isolation underlines the story and the stories from the lives of the two characters.

The lighting is dim and the audience is jolted into alertness by a fierce hammering on the cabin door, and the entry of a young woman in full wedding dress, who has driven all the way from Arizona to escape her impending marriage. For the first time, the audience simultaneously realizes that the bundle on the bed, is in fact a man and for the next uninterrupted 80 minutes, the two protagonists 'lunge and parry', challenging each other, revealing secrets, and showing their deepest scars.

The play is full of allegory and interpreted meanings, including the title of the play itself, where 'Brilliant Traces' really refers to the tracings or lines left by life's scarring moments. Both Rosannah and Henrey have their scars, and it is the unfurling of their personal journeys that creates both poignancy, and some lighter moments.



This is a play that showcases the skill of the two actors. Their accents are flawless, the pace is compelling and there is clever balance between the energy of the two characters. Despite the challenge of a ten minute opening monologue where she talks about little that at that stage, makes sense to the audience, Brock's performance is riveting and believable. Cooney, by contrast is more gently reflective in his style and delivery, sharing Henrey's devastating personal loss with compassion and vulnerability. Choosing to shut himself away from others, Henrey struggles to deal with Rosannah who is terrified of love, commitment, vulnerability and abandonment. It becomes apparent that each has journeyed to the end of the world to escape the traumas of intimacy. In her own way, Rosannah too, is a hermit,

but an emotional one. Each craves a safe haven.

The writing relies, in places, on some heavy handed imagery and layers of allegory. Notwithstanding its cleverness, the dialogue is, at times unnecessarily verbose, taking a very circuitous route to what is a simple meaning. This is particularly evident in long speeches and monologues where the audience may well have got the meaning long before the dialogue finished. For this reason, there was some audience restlessness at about the 60 minute point in the performance.

Lighting and Sound design by Stephen Dean is cleverly embedded, moving from dim light to a stark more confronting lighting that parallels the 'exposure' of Henrey and Rosannah.

The play abounds with layers of meaning, and it is somewhat wordy, but the performances in this unusual play are worth the tickets. Additionally, it is an opportunity to support high quality independent theatre in Adelaide

**Jude Hines Stage Whispers**