

Atlanta



The Bakehouse Theatre. 7 Oct 2017

Atlanta is very finely tuned, extremely emotive, delicately balanced writing by Joanna Murray-Smith. An exceptional cast is needed to play the extraordinary range of spirit, sensitivity, love and pain Murray-Smith explores through a group of friends and their interrelationships. Murray-Smith utilises young Atlanta as the focal lens we perceive them through, balanced against how Atlanta sees herself, her world. Reality and fantasy.

Director, Joh Hartog has an exceptional cast. Hartog has fashioned from them a production reaching to the very depths of human frailty – hope, passion, love, and confusion of the purest white hot honesty – without a false note played. It flows with a hypnotising ease, spun out from Atlanta’s linking monologues and thoughtful rumination.

Tammy Boden’s set married with Stephen Dean’s lighting perfectly enhances the spiritual sense of easy flowing time the production is graced with. Boden’s sea colour geometric floor and back wall, with rope criss-crossed wooden frame stage right is wonderfully ethereal, supporting Deans’s effective use of spot lighting.

Karen Burns anchors the production as Atlanta in what is rightly called a career defining performance. Her mix of assurance, vulnerability, and strength tempered with timidity is all embracing of the audience. Atlanta’s tales of her family history, blended with reflections on her friendship circle and relationship with Alex (Adam Carter) are a whole world, both real and imagined, in which she seeks to define herself and protect herself.

Her friends are offered to us in their own right; the ‘item’, Grace (Stephanie Clapp) and Jack (Patrick Clements), Jess (Claire Mansfield), Gabe (Jack Evans) and Alex. Atlanta shares each of them with us. She explores what it is about them, and her relationship with them, that fascinates or confuses her. Bit by bit, her fears and insecurities dig cracks in her vulnerable psyche. She pushes her self closer then away from them.

Atlanta is so very much about the unique beauty and reality of being human. No more powerfully is this realised than in Alex’s powerful monologue offered as a riposte to Atlanta pushing him away. Carter delivers with the equal intensity Burns gives in her performance. How would he live without her? After her. What would be equal? An easier, less complicated being?

This question is asked by all the characters of their lives. Questions about their needs, their sense of self, their notion of real self, imagined self and the world they live in or see reflected in media.

Atlanta is an experience of tears, of soulfulness, of healing, of love. It is a magnificent testament to being human, and the need to share its experience more deeply with each other.

David O’Brien

When: 5 to 21 Oct

Where: The Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com