

Joh Hartog Productions . Bakehouse Theatre. 25 Sep 2019

"Don't step in the snow," warns the Bakehouse's Peter Green as audience members file in to see the latest Joh Hartog production, *Brilliant Traces*.

Indeed, there is a ring of driven snow surrounding the stage which has become a cosy cabin in the wilds of freezing Alaska. It is a splendid set, so detailed and intense that, in the close proximity of the Bakehouse, one is drawn inside across the fourth wall. It even features live cooking facilities whence soup aroma wafts through the audience.

The plot of this eighty-minute Cindy Lou Johnson play illustrates the similarities and differences between people who are fleeing from life and the mainstream. The hut's occupant is a sad fellow in hiding from the world and his unexpected visitor is a grubby and exhausted bride who has just driven three thousand desperate miles from sunny Arizona rather than go through with her wedding. Cold feet take her to this coldest place.

The cold feet symbolism is interestingly exploited through the story as hapless Henry tries to care for not only this high-strung city girl but also for her fancy wedding shoes.

Thrust together in this confined space, the couple confront not only each other but the emotional needs that have brought them here. It's often explosive cathartics and the clashing of souls in pain. Hartog seems to be in comfortable territory here as a director and the audience feels clasped close to the play's thrashing emotions. It is altogether nicely crafted. And, of course, there is the potent performance of Brendan Cooney as hideaway Henry, his dense beard adding to the authenticity of his character. Cooney presents a painfully gentle, vulnerable character against the frustrations and furies of the unexpected stranger. Krystal Brock parries perfectly as Rosannah, the runaway bride, a character more memorable than likeable.

As usual, Stephen Dean's lighting is perceptive and evocative. That snow-bound cabin feels like a living place, entirely credible as a domestic refuge in the wilderness.

Samela Harris

When: 25 Sep to 5 Oct

Where: Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com