

Death in Bowengabbie

User Rating: ●●●●● / 1

Poor Best



The Bakehouse Theatre. 26 Apr 2014

Second time around and the foyer is packed with a keen new audience. 'Death in Bowengabbie' has proved to be a "keeper". It's a sweet, darkly comic one-hander which, well performed, is a particular richness of story-telling. Quite rightly, playwright Caleb Lewis, has been well recognised for its beautiful prose. He is an outstanding young Australian writer.

'Death in Bowengabbie' draws on the tradition of Irish narrative and for all the world it is an Irish-sounding name. But the town is the somewhere-nowhere home to which architect Oscar must return for the funeral of his

auntie.

He has been away for 15 years. This little valley town, once famous for its jam factory, does rather individualistic funerals and, it seems, it does them often. Oscar, who is on the verge of both marriage to Ruth and a new job in Dubai, has to return repeatedly to Bowengabbie as one after another his elderly rellies falls off the perch.

Elliot Howard not only plays Oscar but also the various characters of Bowengabbie. Astutely directed by Peter Green, he does it with easy and effective underplay. He captures the gauche pushiness of his old school contemporary, Gary, the husky optimism of his grandpa with the laryngal keyhole, and Abby the town vet and quaint old Russian who keeps a pet Tasmanian devil...

As Oscar, he both enacts his tale and tells it in the third person. Green has kept the hour-long production very sparse, clean and clever, depending on Stephen Dean's lighting plot as the subtle mechanism which changes the times and places and moods. Otherwise, apart from several cardboard boxes which transform to gravestones, there is just the black back wall and a few sound effects.

After the show has opened with an amusing old movietone-style dramatis personae, the stage belongs to Elliot. His presence is personable and, as he relaxes into the narrative, he makes vivid the invisible world of the waning little town and the unusual funerals it turns on.

A tender and tentative love story evolves - softly, as is the nature of the piece. It is a particularly gentle and lyrical work but also sad, absurdist and from time to time, very funny indeed. And, it is blessed with a wonderful, satisfying, surprising ending - and one laughs, even against one's better judgement.

Samela Harris

When: 26 Apr to 10 May

Where: The Bakehouse Theatre

Bookings: bakehousetheatre.com