



The Will To Be

By Mark Salvestro. Adelaide Fringe.

Studio at Bakehouse Theatre. February 24-March 7, 2020

'The course of true love never did run smooth': William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Act 1, scene 1).

Never a truer word was said, particularly in *The Will To Be*, written, produced and performed by Mark Salvestro.



We are taken back to 1962 and a university lecturer (William O'Halloran) in Melbourne has been fired from his lecturing position accused of having an affair with a male student.

Set in a lecture room sparsely furnished with a desk, chair, bookcase featuring a copy of the works of William Shakespeare, hatstand, framed degrees and "Whispering Grass" playing softly in the background.

As he packs his belongings, he considers what the next chapter of his life will bring. Should he stay silent and continue living a lie with his adoring wife, or should he take a chance and explore his newfound feelings for Henry at a time when homosexuality is still illegal in Australia?

Having grown up in the sexual repression of the 60s and 70s, for me William's story rings true with his trembling voice, disbelief, self-reproach, disgust and fascination.

His story unfolds alternating between monologues with the audience and flashbacks to his marriage to his wife Lola (who interestingly has the same facial features as his love to be) and his meeting with Henry, a student who meets him on the pretence of wanting to research an audition for *Romeo and Juliet*.

Salvestro as William pleads his case convincingly, particularly in the seduction scenes which are sexually charged and portrays him as the willing victim and also in the scene in which he explains to his wife why the marriage must end.

Right from the opening monologues, he is engaging and rapidly draws us into his life. The rare moments of silence give us time to reflect on his plight as a gay man in a society where being openly gay at that time is abhorrent.

Laced with the Bard's words throughout the production, Salvestro not only gives us a masterful performance of a married man trapped in a non-sexual relationship, but also of a man brave enough to make a new start alone and face the world as himself not what society expects him to be, particularly difficult in the 60s.

The Will To Be offers a fresh glimpse of Australia's history of homosexuality and its accompanying oppression. It is well written, well performed and a reminder of how far we have come as an inclusive society and the distance we still need to travel.

Barry Hill