



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## **ELEGIES: A SONG CYCLE**

**SINGular Productions & Six Foot Something Productions**

**State Opera Studio**

Until 7 Dec 2008

Review by Richard Flynn

"Elegies: a Song Cycle" presents some two dozen songs – solos, duets and full ensembles by its five singers. It's by American playwright/composer William Finn about the loss of friends and family and a response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Most of the songs were composed in memory of his friends, several of whom died of HIV/AIDS. Three deal specifically with the passing of his mother, Barbara Finn. The final set concern the collapse of the World Trade Centre and its emotional aftermath. Some songs are sad, some quite light-hearted and amusing.

Overall, "Elegies" is a beautiful piece of theatre but its premise - that "The living was the prize. The ending's not the story" - is a too-glib summation of life, particularly a life abruptly cut off, ended in less than expected or peaceful circumstance, where those who mourn are searching, often in anger, for some sense to it all.

But the living cannot be separated from the end; indeed it informs the end, whether that is an uncomfortable idea or not. They can't be divorced from the human story and here perhaps is "Elegies" only real weakness. It slides too often into the realm of the sentimental.

David Lampard directs a simply wonderful cast of five singer/actors: Adam Goodburn, Paul Talbot, Cherie Boogaart, Elizabeth Campbell and Mark Oates. He has also designed the simple, evocative set of a few drapes, earth colours of red, brown, peach, apricot, gold, green, and he moves his cast just enough to point up the loosely connected songs. Autumn leaves dropped here and there around the stage are both beautiful and warm, but they also herald decay, even as the glow from them (the cast use some as votive candles) becomes cold and lifeless.

Designer par excellence, Laraine Wheeler, lights it all in understated and entirely appropriate fashion. Rodney Hutton deserves a round of applause all to himself for a sound system quality that is rare in this town. He is an operator who gets the levels right and always ready a tad before the actor speaks or sings. In other words, he does his homework and does not fly blind – not even on Opening Night.

How fortunate is Adelaide that theatre legend, Dale Ringland, now lives here. A man of long and varied experience in theatre around the country, his musical accompaniment on the grand piano is a triumph. The music score is not simple but Ringland executes it with a sensitivity and panache that only someone as good as he can do. Although out of sight by performance time, maestro Timothy Sexton, has brought all together as the show's Musical Director.

To complete the visual stimulation, we are treated to a parade of graphics by photographer, Harmony Nicholas. Her work adds considerably to the overall effect of some eighty minutes of most captivating theatre.

"Elegies: a Song Cycle" will not appeal to everyone but music lovers and those who want to see modern works that otherwise would never make it to Australia are recommended to catch a performance.