



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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A GAMBLER'S GUIDE TO DYING

Holden Street Theatre, Show and Tell and Gary McNair

Holden Street Theatres

Until 13 March

Review by John Wells

I've never been much of a gambler. I vaguely remember a crusty late night in the late eighties, swanning around the newly-opened casino in a borrowed dinner suit, drinking Kahlua and milk, smoking B & H Special Filters (you could do that then) and generally fancying myself as a dashing urban sophisticate. That night I lost a hundred bucks in about nine seconds on the Blackjack tables. Not quite as James Bond as I had imagined.

Gary McNair's beautiful monologue, "A Gambler's Guide to Dying" is not really about gambling. It is about the fizzy delight of anticipation, the power of story-telling and the bond between grandfather and grandson. McNair has a wonderful gift of spinning a yarn; he tells the burnished and exaggerated tale of his Granddad, a lifelong gambler. The grandfather earned a beating from his furious Glasgow mates when he successfully bet on the English to win the 1966 World Cup, and then, after his diagnosis of terminal cancer, he bet he would defy his doctors' predictions and see the millennium tick over.

The story is simple, but the theatrical manifestation is complex, subtle, funny and heart-breaking. McNair is a committed performer, moving effortlessly from the characters of his young self, to his grandfather, to an older, wiser narrator. He is crackling with energy and skill. McNair gives full effect to the wonderful, nuanced, brash poetry of the writing. There is such tenderness, hope and love in this show, with reflections on family, the power of expectation, and how sometimes truth is a fluid notion.

This is a complete show: the simple set is cleverly constructed, lit in soft warm yellows and backed with a well-crafted score. Nothing is out of place.

What a delightful, moving piece of narrative theatre and an early highlight of this year's Fringe.

5 stars out of 5