



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## THE ENCOUNTER

### The Adelaide Festival

Dunstan Playhouse

Until 11 March

Review by John Wells

A middle-aged American photographer wanders into the Amazonian jungle, gets lost, meets some weird nude cat-people, gets beaten up, picks flesh-eating maggots out of his wounds, drinks some strong indigenous hooch, and eventually finds civilisation. Oh, and he also communicates telepathically, discovers the source of the Amazon, and manages to obliterate time itself. Better than a Contiki tour.

“The Encounter” is so much more than the story of American photo-journalist Loren McIntyre, who stumbled across the Mayoruna tribe in the Peruvian jungle in the late '60s. This is a multi-layered scramble of ideas, challenging our understanding of linear time, language, consciousness and perceptions of truth. We are transported into McIntyre's experience, and then into the terrain of these fizzing, sparking ideas by the ingenious and brilliant sound design. The audience wears headphones which give us the intricately-blended soundscape, moving from the intimate to the majestic. We feel the heat of the speaker's breath on our necks, we experience the hooting, clicking and fuzzy snarls of the jungle in darkness, we hear McIntyre's drawl and a sleepy child in London. We are immersed in subtle layers of sound. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears indeed.

Richard Katz performs this monologue in tandem with the extraordinary soundscape. Katz's solo performance is remarkable: focussed, engaging and committed. He moves with agility between roles - from his own persona, to the deeper-voiced McIntyre, to the supporting characters, all the while creating a mesmerising sonic background through sound loops, radio-play-style sound effects and action. The technical expertise is phenomenal.

There are fascinating questions on the idea of truth: this is a theatre company's presentation of a Romanian novelist's version of an American photo-journalist's account of an experience notable for extra-sensory and non-rational behaviour. Where is the truth? The fictions are layered at each level of re-telling. The aural experience reflects the questions – we don't know what is live performance, what is recorded, what is real or what is imagined. The production deftly challenges our awareness of time. Is linear time simply a construct? If we create time, can we also destroy it? Every time we re-tell a story, do we obliterate time and start anew?

These greater abstract themes buzz delightfully around and take time to settle. This is intelligent, exciting, conceptual theatre. But this is theatre of the head and not of the heart, and the only flaw of the production is that McIntyre's story lacks real emotional heft. We are transfixed by Katz's virtuoso performance, we are fascinated by McIntyre's story, but we are not passionately engaged. There is perhaps one too many degrees of meta-theatre: the added level of Katz creating this work in his home (with late-night interruptions from his insomniac daughter) extends the narrative too far.

This is a transfixing, absorbing and beautifully perplexing piece of theatre. You leave enlightened, happily curious, transformed and amused.