



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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THE WILL TO BE

Mark Salvestro

Bakehouse Theatre - Studio

Until 7 Mar 2020

Review by Sarah Westgarth

The great challenge facing all writers is to bring something that feels original to audiences, who often feel like they've seen it all. How do you tell a love story without resorting to clichés? How do you describe oppression authentically and sensitively? How do you depict the past in a way that speaks to contemporary audiences?

Mark Salvestro's "The Will To Be" manages all of these feats, in his one-man show that tells the story of William O'Halloran, a university lecturer who finds himself on the receiving end of a dismissal letter from his Head of English. It is 1962, homosexuality is illegal in this country, and this is a decision that is described to him as one of "mercy." As he packs up his stationary, framed degrees, and beloved copies of Shakespeare's Collected Works, he recalls the defining decisions that have led him to this moment.

It is a piece of theatre that feels dazzlingly fresh and alive, even as it draws on the most infamous love story of all, "Romeo and Juliet", to tell its own star-crossed lovers tale. However, "The Will To Be" is more than just a tragic love story; it is an exploration of Australia's queer history, a psychological dive into the nature of societal shame, and a defiant cry to speak truth to power.

William is a character that has been lovingly created by Salvestro, and brought to life in a captivating performance. He plays William with an endearing vulnerability, even through the more difficult or painful moments. This is a play that calls for great empathy, and this is achieved through the tenderness in which Salvestro portrays William's emotional complexity. This is never more on display than in the depictions of William's relationship with Henry, an aspiring actor who calls upon William's Shakespearean expertise to assist him with an audition. It is a relationship that is fraught with danger, and Salvestro conveys the tension, passion and conflict between the two in a way that is completely enthralling, and devastatingly romantic. "The Will To Be" is about more than just William and Henry, though. Salvestro uses them and their position in that time and place to explore what it means to be taught to hide who you are, and the price tag that freedom can have.

"The Will To Be" has an irresistible earnestness to its approach, never feeling cynical or self-righteous. The delicate sensitivity with which the story is told imbues it with an extraordinary richness that is moving in all the right ways. Mark Salvestro uses well-worn words with a fresh and vital voice, to create a tale told by a teacher, full of sound and fury, signifying everything.

Rating: 5 stars (out of 5)