

Challenging and questioning drama



Geese. Written and directed by Joe Woodward. Shadow House PITS Company.

Courtyard Studio. Canberra Theatre Centre. Until April 30.

It is the courage to confront conformity that most strikingly defines writer-director Joe Woodward's latest work for his Shadow House PITS Company. *Geese* is stridently anarchic, an electric shock to the cranium of complacency and passive acceptance. Audiences will find little comfort in the play's relentless dialectic.

For Woodward, the theatre, like life, is an investigation, a constant stream of questions, spurting forth from his platform of ideas. Audiences are enticed into Woodward's theatre of ideological discourse and intellectual debate on issues that define the very fabric of our lives. Like the geese who screeched their warning to the Romans of the approach of the marauding Gauls, Woodward's theatre sounds its warning against the boring predictability of theatrical smugness.

There is nothing boring about this carefully and imaginatively structured drama. Inspired by the anti-establishment ideas of agonised theatre theorist Antonin Artaud, the transformative confrontation of the Japanese Butoh dance drama and the powerfully mesmerising, meta-

morphic power of Noh theatre, Woodward and his company construct a simple drama to encompass the complex search for the meaning of our existence. Essentially, a 13-year-old child, Anais (Hannah Cormick), witnesses the death at a railway station of a disturbed man, Simon Weigl (played with riveting torment by Jack Spahr). During the ensuing years she pieces together what might have run through his mind during those final moments. Memory and reflection merge in a surreal and ghostly world, inhabited by the three women who influenced Weigl in life: his fanatically religious mother (Anna Voronoff), the revolutionary lover, Eva (Alison McGregor) and Green, his spiritual Muse (Carolyn Minchin). As the taunting, licentious Geese, Braiden Dunn lends the drama an eerie, symbolic decadence, conjuring the demons of desire.

Woodward's theatre of investigation is evocatively underscored by Damien Foley's music and soundscape, lending this "contemporary fantasia" a surreal and disturbing relevance to the human experience, symbolically depicted throughout the performance by The Painter (Jessica Fairbairn). Meaning is in the mind of the beholder.

Woodward and his company demand engagement and there is much to engage with in the production's imagery, language, music and movement. Actors, directors and drama students would benefit greatly from a visit to *Geese* and audiences who appreciate the challenging role of a theatre of ideas will find much to ponder in this production.

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