

13 April, 2016

INTIMATE LINKS WITH GRIEF OF A PAST AGE

The Tree Widows
Queen's Domain
Until April 17

Verbatim Theatre is created from the exact words of individuals interviewed about a particular topic – in this case the sponsors of trees planted in Hobart's Domain as a memorial to local soldiers killed in the Great War.

Done well it creates characters, images and stories of surprising beauty, power and depth. Alana Valentine is one of Australia's foremost exponents of the art.

Her gift to Tasmanian audiences is this sublime meditation on the way we make sense of our own lives through private and shared memorials to the dead. Spanning generations, this is one of the very rare plays in which you feel yourself rubbing up against the cultural DNA of an entire city.

Essentially 18 monologues, the meditative qualities of the show are only enhanced by the staging of the play as a mini-pilgrim's walk.

As we stroll between the trees hearing the words of the children, farmers, cleaners, office workers, housewives, great nephews and nieces who populate the play, we find space to reflect – on their lives, on the lives of the dead, and the bone dry bush site itself, perched beside the Derwent.

The acting ensemble is assured with Guy Hooper and in particular Jane Johnson producing some real heart in the mouth moments.

Valentine's costumes are striking and effective.

I hope this inspired commission by the Tas Theatre Company finds the audience it richly deserves.

Michael McLaughlin