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Intriguing road trip down memory lane

July 8 2014 at 11:44am
By Beverley Brommert

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DRIVE WITH ME

DIRECTOR: Liz Mills

CAST: Megan Furniss

VENUE: Alexander Upstairs at Alexander Bar and Café

UNTIL: Saturday

RATING: *****

WHEN a multi-talented theatre-maker and a respected director join forces, one can expect something remarkable to result, and Drive with Me exceeds expectation.



Drive With Me

From the moment Megan Furniss (pictured) bustles on stage, it is apparent that this is not just another one-hander. The audience is present in its own right as part of the action: we are attending a lecture at the Grahamstown Festival, a perennial favourite repeated by popular demand and titled The Road Trip – taking a look at the journey in both the actual and metaphoric sense.

And that is precisely what is unveiled in the course of this riveting piece of theatre, only instead of academic discourse, the audience is presented with an intensely personal journey which is that of the lecturer herself.

The rich tapestry of memories, impressions, resentments and nostalgia is interwoven with literary references to great journeys as a reminder that this 49-year old eccentric is engaged in a didactic exercise at a festival. From Homer's Odyssey through Chaucer's account of the pilgrimage to Canterbury to Stephen King's The Talisman, journeys of note provide a counterpoint to the universal journey which every human being undertakes from birth – the way travelled through life.

Gradually the presence of Thanatos invades the script with chilling subtlety: it starts with a childhood memory of a dead dog on the road and progresses to increasingly graphic evocations of death on the highway, culminating in a nightmarish surreality haunted by ravens and faceless creatures.

This is a quantum leap from the reassuringly familiar account of preparations for an 889km drive from Cape Town to Grahamstown (with which the monologue opens), and it is a far more eloquent indictment of carnage on the roads than any commissioned pamphlet pleading for restraint behind the wheel.

Furniss offers an exemplary performance, with crystalline diction, unwavering eye-contact, expressive silences and timing that keeps the audience wondering what is next. This is due in equal measure to natural talent and judicious direction.

Drive with Me may not be a tempting invitation once its true import is realised, but as a piece of theatre it is a gem not to be missed.

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