

## Refined artistry at its most profound

 By Daniel Dercksen 23 Jul 2013

Being watchful has never been more astute as with the delicious delectable dark comedy Vigil.



Morris Panych's quirky text, brimming with a refined sense of wit and a profound insight into the human condition, takes us on an astonishing journey into the lives of two enchanting characters: a lonely old woman living contently in the isolation of her bedroom and a middle-aged despondent neurotic who enters her world with meaning and intent, and changes both their lives forever.

The alluring magic and suspense of Vigil lies in its resolution, so it's best to know as little about its outcome before seeing it; the less you know, the more vigilant you will be, and the more you uncover during its hilarious and heart-breaking journey, the greater your experience will be. It's one of those remarkable plays in which you instantly fall in love with its characters and want to take them home with you.

### Stupendous in a demanding role

Graham Hopkins is stupendous in a demanding role that dominates the story; he not only makes us fully believe in the actions of Kemp, but the vivid recollections of his life - and his brutal honesty makes us care deeply about him. Vanessa Cooke commands the stage in radiant silence with her superb performance as Grace; although she only utters a few words, her unspoken communication speaks volumes, powerfully reflecting the angst, neurosis and pathetic foolishness of Hopkins' character. The symbiosis between what is said and not said, as well as between intent and odd behaviour, allows for marvellous drama and comedy that evokes emotion and is immensely entertaining without ever becoming condescending. There is a Kemp and Grace inside all of us; they are familiar reminders of the love/hate relationship we have with ourselves and loved ones that causes us to regret lost moments, and cherish fond memories.

Julia Anastasopoulos' imaginative set design is a marvellous supporting character in the play, constantly underscoring the emotions of the characters and revealing their humanity; the suspense of the drama, and anxieties of the characters, are potently heightened by the ticking clock and exposed through its wacky discord. The superb lighting design, by Chris Weare, infuses the design and text with a powerful life force working in harmony with the equally brilliant sound design by Weare; it is this constant battle between what we see and what we hear (or don't), that gives the play a sustained momentum and constantly reflects the interior world of the characters.

### A pleasure to watch and experience

This symphonic dance between sound and visual splendour, humour and pathos, and the reflective duality of human nature is refined artistry that is a pleasure to watch and experience. You will laugh and weep with joy as *Vigil*'s clever-and-intelligent exposition draws you into a unique and uplifting experience.

It is reminiscent of Hal Ashby's cult film *Harold and Maude*, in which two opposites collide and implode; gently revealing issues dealing with the fragile nature of old age, bereavement, solitude, and despair that is life affirming and awakens an astute awareness of how important it is to turn life into an adventure and wholeheartedly share our joys and sorrows with those who fill our lives with gloom and bliss. *Vigil* also allows us to step outside our own prejudice and point of view, and see the world through the eyes of two people you will never forget.

*Vigil* fits director Chris Weare like a glove and his skilful direction keeps us in the palm of his hand from start to finish; Weare's perceptive understanding of the text, the characters and story once again allows for a superb interaction between the characters and the plot, as well as uncovering the glorious sub-textual treasure trove.

*Vigil* is a great reminder that being watchful has its pitfalls; by being too vigilant we mostly see everything but the truth, and when we are not vigilant it exposes a vulnerability that reveals our true nature. It shows that if we do not imprison ourselves and our imaginations, and if we speak our minds, the truth will not only set us free but allows us to see things as they are. It is wonderful how the play dares to say what we are afraid to; its honesty and sincerity are reflected in our laughter as it reflects our own humanness.

All good things have to come to an end and, unfortunately, with this exceptional production, we have to leave its extraordinary world and resort back to our normal routines; chances are that how you see the world and your own existence will drastically be altered and you will feel great about experiencing theatre that is profound and mesmerising.

*Make sure to see Vigil before it ends its run at the Fugard Studio Theatre in Cape Town until 3 August. Performances are nightly at 8pm with matinees on Saturdays at 4pm. Tickets from R120 to R160.*

Read more about *Vigil* at [www.writingstudio.co.za/page4561.html](http://www.writingstudio.co.za/page4561.html)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za) View my profile and articles...

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