

One-Man Epic an Attention-Keeper

Theatre Review

By CLEM GORMAN

Glen Berger's *UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL*, by *Three River Theatre* and *Centr Stage* at the Annexe Theatre, Inveresk

One-person plays are difficult to stage successfully because they depend on the virtuosity of one actor, who must obey T. S. Eliot's dictum - 1: Hold the audience's attention; 2: Don't lose it; 3: Repeat 1 and 2.

Stan Gottschalk holds our attention masterfully in this 1 1/4 hour New York play, skillfully directed by Stuart Loone, which starts when a librarian discovers a book has been returned after 113 years.

Some one-person plays use the device of having the actor play numerous roles. In this one Gottschalk plays only the librarian. But he completes such an amazing journey, in time, in space and in a sense beyond both, that this play assumes the form of an epic.

It is a remarkable achievement for such a restricted and limited form as the one-person play to embrace such a breadth of places, themes and ideas.

Most epics involve a journey of the avatar hero who represents and leads a community towards a promised land or empire. In this play Gottschalk transforms an obscure librarian into an epic hero whose journey leads us towards our own best dreams and highest ideals.

The set is utilitarian and the lighting and sound minimal, but the actor uses a blackboard and a slide projector to create, almost, other characters on stage.

Patrons will inevitably compare this play with Mel Gibson's film *The Passion Of The Christ*, and the play will not suffer by the comparison.

Humorous, mysterious and never dull, this is a journey of the soul with the power to transform.

This performance continues at the Annexe Theatre, Inveresk, until Saturday.