

Road Movie / Review

Cameron Woodhead / *THE AGE* - January 27, 2012

Dirk Hoult in *Road Movie*. Photo: Rodger Cummin

Rating: 4 out of 5 stars

MIDSUMMA THEATRE - ROAD MOVIE

By Godfrey Hamilton, Gasworks Arts Park, until tomorrow

THIS one-man show is a poetic and moving tour of AIDS-era America.

The disease ravaged the gay population in the US in the 1980s, thanks to the Reagan administration's indifference and its failure to promote condom use, but despite the enormity of the show's grief, the script never stoops to mere sentiment. The tragedy is leavened by brilliantly observed caricature that retains the human shape beneath it, and Godfrey Hamilton has an unusual gift for strong metaphor and precise visual imagery that carries the weight of suppressed emotion.



Dirk Hoult gives a bravura performance as Joel, a gay man from New York who winds up in a San Francisco gutter, meets a stranger and falls in love. The West Coast sojourn ends as quickly as it began, but Joel is drawn back to his lover, and embarks on a road trip across America to see him.

Along the way, he meets a motley cast of eccentrics: a black woman handing out condoms in Atlanta, Georgia, spurred to action by her son's grim death; a lonely waitress at a desert diner whose daughter committed suicide; an unreconstructed Californian hippie resolving (or perhaps avoiding) her grief through psychoactive pursuits.

Joel also visits the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington - that black snake of a monument with dead men's names for scales - and compares it to those who have fallen to AIDS, feared and forgotten while they were alive.

Road Movie might seem a period piece in the West in the age of effective HIV-fighting medication, but Hoult's acting - pitch-perfect accents, lightning character switches, and easy command of the stage - makes it soar.