



Sydney theatre company EARTH Visual and Physical has devised a visually rich and intricate stage production of Patricia Wrightson's much-loved 1973 children's novel *The Nargun and the Stars*.

The company, best known for its big outdoor shows, transposes its dramatic visual style — involving enormous inflatable sets, beautiful puppets and projected images — smoothly into the relative confines of a theatre, offering a scale of performance for children not often seen on Perth stages.

However, the production encounters problems in containing Wrightson's complex story about a young orphan who discovers a world of mythological bush creatures (drawn by Wrightson from Aboriginal folklore) into a 70-minute show holding the attention of the young.

On one level it is about the orphan, Simon (Tom Green), dealing with his grief and displacement when he has to move from the city to the isolated countryside to live with some distant relatives Edie (Annie Byron) and Charlie (Bill Young).

The story turns into something of an adventure as Simon discovers a world around him full of strange, sometimes scary creatures, including a lizard-like water creature (Potkoo-rok), tree creatures (Turongs) and the Nargun of the title — a powerful, ancient living rock who is suffering her own sense of dislocation.

The mysterious, otherworldly elements of Wrightson's story have been conveyed with atmospheric use of puppetry, dramatic lighting and projected imagery under Scott Wright and Wesley Enoch's direction. But it is an esoteric premise, the need for the Nargun to find her place in the natural world; a difficult one for children to grasp entirely.

My eight-year-old, clinging fretfully to my arm, didn't know what to make of the big rock-like creature, who in the play's opening

THEATRE

The Nargun and the Stars
 Adapted by Verity Laughton
 Directed by Scott Wright and Wesley Enoch
 Regal Theatre
 Review: Pier Leach

is presented as a magical being of the cosmos but turns out to be a deeply threatening force of nature. (The production notes say stories of Narguns were used by Aboriginals to keep children close to camp at night).

Adapting writer Verity Laughton has clearly tried to lay out the problem simply for children, but too often relies on exposition to propel the storyline, which — despite the constant action onstage — drags through the middle section. Green, particularly, has a great deal of

clunky dialogue to contend with, which makes the enterprise feel stacey and contrived in places.

Despite its confusions, the production makes a striking impression as a work of visual theatre. There is a stunning storm, replete with thunder, lightning and hail projected on to a scrim at the front of the stage, and a beautifully executed underwater scene in which an aerially suspended Green swims with the Potkoo-rok. The sets are beautifully detailed and the range of puppets exquisite.

It is an

ambitious production, and even though the story might not click just yet it already has a lot of visual interest for young people.

The Nargun and the Stars ends March 1.



Cast: Tom Green as the orphan Simon befriends the Turong, a tree creature, in The Nargun and the Stars