

Antigone and the fight against dullness

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Matthew Lutton directs Antigone.

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Matthew Lutton has returned to his home city of Perth to stage Antigone as part of the Perth International Arts Festival.

At the age of 24 he has a nationally renowned company, Thin Ice, which he started when he was 18 and he has developed a reputation for being confronting, dark and edgy in his work.

But it isn't all smooth sailing for Lutton.

"There's always a sense of you get boxed in and I do feel boxed in sometimes but I am comfortable with that side of the box, I would rather be boxed in this side than the more conservative, mainstream side of theatre," Lutton said.

"A lot of the time my guide is just making the work that I want to make so as long as I'm doing that I feel phenomenally satisfied.

"I don't feel a lot of pressure from it.

"I feel like a lot of people give me a lot of opportunities and take a lot of risks on me and the sort of bargain is if they take a risk on me that I don't back away from what I said I was going to do."

Though he grew up in Perth and studied for three years at the WA Academy of Performing Arts the local arts scene doesn't inspire him.

"I'm very two-minded and two-faced about it," Lutton said.

"I always look forward to returning to Perth knowing that I am going to leave soon.

"I don't find a lot of inspiration in Perth but what that did do was did cause me to reach out to different artists and research different decades, different cultures, different counties.

"I'm a scavenger and I collect things from all sorts of artists and art forms but I never want to duplicate another's work it just about gaining a greater vocabulary.

"Perth is my place of quiet reflection.

"What is really exciting in Perth for me at the moment is that there is an energy to change I think there is a real desire to try something new.

"I think we're extremely paranoid that we are boring and dull and therefore more than other cities we want to shake that off and will take the extra steps to prove that.

"I feel there is an audience and community that are really willing to listen a bit more.

"The Perth International Arts Festival is really amazing event on the calendar each year and it allows the most isolated city in the world, by land, to connect to a much larger network of artists and cultures so being a part of that is a real honour and thrill as a local artist to join that dialogue.

"In creating new theatre you have to have the right to fail and the right to explore and Perth I feel, as my home gives me that permission."

Lutton has achieved a lot in his 24 years having staged Red Shoes as a part of last year's Artrage and recently Tartuffe, Woyzeck and The Visit.

But his age is not really a factor when viewing his work. It bellies wisdom beyond his years and it is his interest in the endless question of meaning that makes his modern staging of Sophocles' ancient Greek drama so bold.

Just as Sophocles wrote Antigone with timeless messages about family, love and loss so too Lutton echoes those messages with a contemporary aesthetic.

The story reflects how Oedipus and the curse of having fallen in love with his mother and killing his father now stains the fate of his two sons and two daughters, which includes Antigone.

It is the death of his two sons pitted against each other to rule the land that results in a declaration by the uncle and newly-appointed king, Creon to declare one of the sons a traitor and that no traitors are to be buried.

However Antigone defies the law and pushes the limits of love and leadership to breaking point.

It is her defiance that questions faith in the system and highlights the dangers of fanaticism.

Performed by Kate Mulvany, from the Sydney Theatre Company, it is the strength of Antigone and Lutton's vision that drew her to the play.

"She's just a character that I think every actress wants to play Antigone just as, maybe every male actor wants to play the Dane, play hamlet," Mulvany said.

"She's just that kind of character that is great for an actor to get your teeth into.

"The energy that he was going to bring to it and the way he saw the character of Antigone was very similar to how I wanted to see her played and hadn't seen for a while.

"It was not in a modern take, more a modern energy behind it."

Lutton's depiction shows the rawness and filth of taking bodies from a battlefield and the strain that then flows through those who are left behind to clean up the mess.

There is a lot of mud, water and visual effects that continue the dialogue long after the actors finish their lines and when accompanied by the songs that are written and performed by Rachael Dease the overall effect is powerful and haunting.

"It feels like the whole of Thebes has been woken up from their sleep, 'there's a war, there's a war, there's tragedy, there's drama, you've got to get up and go and sort it out'," Mulvany said.

"They are literally woken from their beds and that is why they are in their tracksuit pants.

"I think it translates well with the mud, the blood and the guts.

"You wouldn't put on your best gear you would get on your tracksuit pants and you'd go out and do it."

Though it is not staged to be political it still brings a political message.

"That is what war is, it doesn't matter where it is, it's the soldiers living on the adrenaline, fear and anxiety while people are sitting back home are letting the politicians run things in a comatose type state," Mulvany said.

"Whenever you put on a play about war on stage it can mirror what is going on at that time.

"Hopefully things are changing and hopefully there are a lot more Antigones out there saying 'hey I don't like this' and having the voice to say so and audiences that have seen that can stand up and say it is wrong.

"I think the winds of change are taking shape now."

Lutton agrees.

"The play ends with the line 'time age us, teach us to be wiser'," he said.

"By watching this play we might become wiser."

Antigone opens this Wednesday at the Subiaco Arts Centre and closes March 7.

Tickets are about \$35 and are available through BOCS, www.bocsticketing.com.au.