

THE SCOTSMAN
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Dulcinea Langfelder is extraordinary in the groundbreaking Victoria

Victoria

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ASSEMBLY AURORA NOVA (VENUE 8)

VICTORIA has dementia. She doesn't know she's in hospital, or recognise the people who come to visit her, because her memory is being wiped clean every few minutes. She begins to tell a story only to find it fragments before she reaches the end.

But Victoria has not lost her imagination. She can talk to her shadow, find a "well-hung" new friend (a fold of curtain). She can be 30 again, dancing the tango with her wheelchair as her partner; we sense that, in her heyday, Victoria was something of a performer.

This extraordinary piece of theatre, created and performed by Montreal-based Dulcinea Langfelder, is a journey to a place we all hope we'll never visit. It's funny, harrowing and infused with humanity. Victoria has lost her memory, but she has not - yet - lost herself.

Her world is evoked in a clever, witty script, interwoven with shadow play and beautifully choreographed movement, staged on a sterile set of white hospital curtains. Langfelder,

wearing a stained hospital gown and a pair of incontinence pants, charts the journey through old age, from frustration at her lack of memory, to a kind of surreal contentment in which she no longer misses it.

Language becomes fluid, she slips from English to French to Italian, yet occasionally her ramblings arrive at moments of crystal clarity.

When she says, "the important thing is that we're here now", the words take on a profound resonance. Victoria's memory loss means she is fated to live in the eternal present.

She has to be extricated from various scrapes by her long-suffering nurse (Eric Gingras), who seems to have problems enough of his own. But he is changed by his encounter with Victoria. As she follows the inevitable trajectory into a twilight world where even language eludes her, he becomes more emotionally able to be her carer.

Victoria is a powerful reflection on dementia, how relentless and ridiculous and heart-breaking it is. It is a subtle, empathetic and ultimately beautiful study of a subject most people would rather avoid.

Until 27 August. Tomorrow 4.10pm

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