

# A little right music

## Wilde One back

THE Green Room award-nominated *Tea with Oscar* returns to Chapel Off Chapel this week. The show, written by director/lyricist Gary Young and performer/singer Paul Keelan, was premiered at the same venue in November to commemorate the centenary of the death of Wilde, and is now returning by popular demand for a 10-show season.

*Tea With Oscar* is set in a Victorian drawing room one year after the writer's death, where six of his friends gather to remember him. On March 23, 24, 29-31 and April 4, 6, 7, with matinees on April 1 and 8. Book: 9522 3390.

In November last year, Chapel off Chapel came up with another gem, entitled *Tea With Oscar*, again with a cast of five plus one musician. This was a musical adaptation of four of Oscar Wilde's short stories by the adaptor and lyricist Gary Young and his composer colleague Paul Keelan. Four friends of Oscar Wilde gather a year after Oscar's death for a celebratory tea party; one of their sons asks an elder to read some of Wilde's stories from a large storybook—whereupon the protagonists narrate and enact the stories, with specific character-songs (again solos, duets and quartets) confidently and very competently woven into the narrative.

The cast seamlessly personify dozens of characters, using the barest of means—occasional costume changes, simple choreography, body language. The tunes are a touch Lloyd Webberish, but the piece as a whole reminds us of what a good storyteller Wilde was. The repeated musical refrains in 'The Nightingale and the Rose' and 'The Happy Prince', for example, capture the essence of his often ironic (and sometimes autobiographical) intent.

Given the pleasure and emotional release that Australian music theatre pieces like these can generate, why bother trying to copy the razzamatuzz of our American cousins? None of these are ever going to make big money, but they demonstrate a mastery of the craft of music theatre-making which is truly admirable and they suggest that there is a future for the Australian musical—at the chamber level. And what's wrong with that? ■