

# Youthful flavour in Wilde tribute

## Musical

Tea With Oscar  
Chapel on Chapel,  
Melbourne, ends  
December 3

IT is 100 years next Thursday since poet and author Oscar Wilde died, and this innovative production does him proud.

Using four of his charming short stories, the writing team of Paul Keelan and Gary Young has moulded an effective tribute, interweaving Wilde's words into a simple musical celebration.

The characters so vividly created by Wilde in *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Remarkable Rocket* and *The Happy Prince* cross the ages. Their poignant and moralistic stories, bedtime tales for Wilde's own children, provide entertaining adult listening too. And best of all, in building on Wilde's creations and adding musical numbers to the stories, Keelan and Young's efforts stay within the parameters of the drama, their music never upstaging Wilde's original ideas.

In a Victorian drawing room a year after Wilde's death, six performers create simple vignettes as they read and act out the stories, taking turns at key roles. With Young as a central narrator and Keelan at the keyboard, most of the dramatic focus falls to Grant Smith, Jackie Rees and Toby Truscott. Youngster Darcy Bonser joins them to punctuate the stories from a child's point of view.

The production, directed by Young, is somewhat static within the Victorian framework, but it works wonderfully because the words Wilde's characters utter provide the necessary colour and movement from the performance area.

A master of comic character, Smith takes the full brunt of much of the fun of this production. With the simple lifting of an eye or the snarl or sense of seduction in his mellifluous voice, he can certainly turn a phrase. As the pompous central character in the family of fireworks played out in *The Remarkable Rocket*, he steals the show in a solo number full of gunpowder and bravura.

Rees and Truscott, too, have their respective moments as the tragic Nightingale and the winter-worn little Swallow who befriends the Happy Prince.

Keelan's music is pleasantly even and with Young's cleverly balanced lyrics it works exceedingly well. It is a pleasure to hear the performers, all great communicators, work without the assistance of amplification.

The show sits nicely in the regimented shape of Chapel on Chapel but I can imagine it succeeding equally well in the slightly larger Fairfax Studio space at the Victorian Arts Centre, where there is no reason for it to lose any of its intimacy and charm.

Jeremy Vincent