



## ARTS

Edited by Stephen Bevis



# Musty air of mystery



### THEATRE

Don't Look Back  
By dreamthinkspeak  
Old Treasury Building  
Review: Pier Leach

Taking people out of their comfort zones is something British visual artist and theatre director Tristan Sharps has turned into a unique art form.

His promenade performance piece *Don't Look Back* is unlike anything you're likely to have experienced and the performance and multimedia elements he combines are carefully designed to transport you to a different state of mind. I thoroughly recommend submitting yourself.

As Sharps well knows, there is something mysterious and slightly unsettling about being in an empty public building after hours. Even more so, perhaps, when it is a creaky, disused building; in this case the formidable Old Treasury Building in St Georges Terrace.

Most of us have passed it countless times but few would have set foot inside in many years, if ever. So if it has ever piqued your curiosity, now is the time to wander through its

labyrinthine rooms and corridors and breathe in the musty scent of its history.

But while the building is integral to Sharps' site-specific work, it is just the beginning of the intricately detailed, atmospheric experience he has plotted — starting with the specification that groups entering be no bigger than three people (groups are let through at five-minute intervals).

Going through the first door after waiting in the makeshift lobby is like entering a portal into another world. Whether you venture in from the hustle and glare of the day or the mostly deserted Perth night, it doesn't take long — after being given instructions by a kind of Victorian gatekeeper (alternately played by James Hagan and George Shevtsov) — to be enveloped by the strange, otherworldly atmosphere.

Sharps, the artistic director of Brighton-based theatre company dreamthinkspeak, has said that *Don't Look Back* was inspired by the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

When Eurydice dies on her wedding day, the gods are so moved by Orpheus' lyre-playing they allow him to retrieve Eurydice from the Underworld and lead her back to the land of the living — on the one

condition that he doesn't look back at her. Of course he does, Eurydice is sucked back to the Underworld and Orpheus is left in an agonising limbo of loss.

But the legend is the mere springboard for the performance. *Don't Look Back* is anything but linear, structured narrative. Instead, it is a disorienting journey through intriguingly lit rooms and corridors full of meticulously created images, soundscapes (composed by Max Richter), fleeting dramatic moments and occasional interactions with sleepy inhabitants of the Underworld (played by WAAPA students) who make you feel as if you're the anomaly; the ghostly intruder.

Again, the building itself looms large and there are several (fitting) reminders that Sharps has created his land of the dead in a building with a history of government bureaucracy.

Tempting as it is to dissect the show and describe it in detail, it is almost certainly best to experience it without expectations of what you might see. My advice would simply be to take your time, be curious and surrender yourself to an hour of Sharps' poetic, transformative theatre.

**Don't Look Back has afternoon and evening sessions until February 24.**



Don't Look Back: Poetic, transformative theatre