

Don't Look Back

HM General Register House

Dreamthinkspeak's Victorian-era take on the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is an atmosphere-laden voyage through the underworld. The audience is dispatched in pairs or trios into the depths of Scotland's register for births, deaths and marriages, an astonishing building, built around a circular domed archive whose eery iron-framed levels and tome-lined secret passages are accessed only by spiral staircases swallowed up in the shadows.

Without giving too much away, projections, mad archivists, a violinist and a ghostly woman in white create elements of the Greek myth of Orpheus, a virtuoso lyre player who is allowed by the gods to descend into the underworld to lead his dead lover Eurydice back to the land of the living. As she follows, he is instructed not look back at her - but he does, and his lover is dragged back to the dead, leaving Orpheus condemned to a life of desolation.

Spooky, suspenseful, claustrophobic and yet serene, this Hades impels you ever on, yet dares to dare you to look back to see what - or who - you might have missed. In fact, audience involvement is far deeper than in many other promenade performances.

Of course the fact of walking through the installation makes you a participant, but there is also the interaction that develops between the members of each group, vital since there is so much to spot and absorb. Of our trio, for instance, one handily was able to whisper every episode of the myth as we made our way through the shadows, while a second found herself correctly working out the significance of our ever-changing surroundings. As for me, I thought hard how best to write up this extraordinary experience.