



Graham Weir: Death becomes him

BEVERLEY BROMMERT

A MAN clad in black sits in a black chair against a black backdrop... he barely moves in the course of an hour-long monologue, but in this stringently Stygian setting he takes his audience through a series of encounters with Death that keeps spectators in thrall.

Graham Weir has not graced the stage for a while, but this latest drama devised and performed by him reaffirms his brilliance; whether narrating or singing, his performance is worthy of five stars, abetted by Bo Petersen's skilful direction.

The opening sketch of *Dead Yellow Sands* is deceptively bland. Weir fixes his listeners with an intense gaze full of candour and confides childhood reminiscences of a roadshow featuring two dolphins named Bonnie and Clyde who perished miserably away from their natural habitat, the first of serial

DEAD YELLOW SANDS

DIRECTOR: Bo Petersen
CAST: Graham Weir
VENUE: Alexander Upstairs at Alexander Bar
UNTIL: Saturday
RATING: ★★★★★

narratives concerning the Grim Reaper. Born and raised in Benoni, he explains that the town's name means "son of my sorrow", and there is an abundance of the latter commodity in what is to follow.

Guy de Lancey's ingeniously devised lighting is the only help Weir has in signalling a change of setting and persona – other than his own masterly control of accent, register and body language. From that child's vicarious experience of death, he steers us through an awareness of Thanatos from one age

of man to the next in a deftly crafted piece of drama: we meet a grotesque and desperate youth who commits suicide; from his self-inflicted death we move on to the accidental demise on Christmas Eve of a silo cleaner who definitely had no intention of dying at that particular moment. Next comes a compulsive singer lamenting the lost glamour of Joburg's theatres in their heyday and contemplating a

future that can only end in death, and thereafter the slope continues ever downward through depictions of old age, frailty, and an increasing awareness of human mortality: loss of faculties, old age homes, dependence on others. This not cheerful material. It culminates in a monologue from a patient battling post-operative septicaemia in intensive care and lusting after whisky, with the inevitable

end coming sooner rather than later. Finally there is the liberating evocation of a starlit beach that distances one from the relentless gloom of what has gone before. This might not seem to be the stuff of conventional entertainment, yet it is compelling and oddly impersonal despite its universality, enlivened with first-class singing where appropriate. A tour de force not to be missed.