



Mesmerising, even in slow-motion

IT'S a big event when Tess de Quincey raises her arm halfway through *Embrace: Guilt Frame* because to this point de Quincey and her co-performer, Peter Snow, have done little more than move very, very slowly and silently while letting a number of emotions ripple across their faces. Because they're confined to a picture frame big enough to contain only their heads and shoulders, there's not a lot of room for what we might call dramatic action.

But what could be seen at first blush as an impossible restriction opens up a world of possibilities. The picture frame — gilt, of course, and beautifully lit by Travis Hodgson — draws in the viewer inexorably. There is nowhere else to look so concentration is deliciously sharpened and heightened and every movement and gesture is amplified.

Snow and de Quincey never touch but seem inexorably tied to one another nevertheless. Each has their own take on the feeling being shown, which creates its own mini-narrative.

When the cheerfully open-faced Snow suddenly looks terribly old and sad, you want

de Quincey to comfort him, but she doesn't, and the moment passes. When they laugh you want to share their fun.

Are we looking at scenes from a contemporary marriage, changing aspects of double portraits in the style of Rembrandt or an academic treatise on how different interior states are expressed? It could be all of them, and more, as the audience inevitably makes up its own stories.

De Quincey, with her stand-up shock of white hair, looks like a flower that grows so quickly you can see the change, but not really how it happened. Her control is extraordinary. Snow is a little more fluid, a little more human. Together they are mesmerising.

Sound designer Michael Toisuta's *Homage to Ligeti*, inspired by Ligeti's *Poeme Symphonique pour 100 Metronomes* is integral to the shape of the work.

Unlike the Ligeti, which moves in a straight line, Toisuta's work creates a kind of palindrome. There's a build-up from one to many and back again. At its height the sound clatters like massive drops of rain pelting down on a corrugated iron roof, then retreats

in sympathy with the states de Quincey and Snow are expressing.

Embrace: Guilt Frame loses a little of that shapeliness towards the end so it was interesting to learn at the post-show discussion that the last 10 minutes or so are improvised.

It's all over in just 40 minutes, time that speeds by. One of the many intriguing qualities of *Embrace: Guilt Frame* is that its apparent snail's pace makes time accelerate.

This is Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton's first piece of programming for Sydney Theatre Company. It suggests they'll be bold and open-minded about what theatre is and should be. Great news.

Deborah Jones

PHYSICAL THEATRE

Embrace: Guilt Frame

Created and performed by Tess de Quincey and Peter Snow. Wharf 2LOUD. Richard Wherrett Studio, Sydney Theatre, Sydney, March 4. Tickets: \$35. Bookings: (02) 9250 1777. Ends March 9.



Sharpened and heightened: Tess de Quincey and Peter Snow in *Embrace: Guilt Frame*