



ARTS / LIVE

Review: The Window Outside.

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Director Liz Connors guides a stellar cast through the complexity of end of life issues in The Wise Owl Theatres' production of the *The Window Outside*.

The play opens on an older couple, Frank and Evelyn dancing in the moonlight. As they reminisce about the life they've built together, the scene gives way to a suburban living room. Frank retires into a wheelchair, paralysed. Evelyn continues to chatter away to him, but her tone becomes less coherent. Later, when questioned by her daughter, she can't recall whether she's bathed her husband. Her earlier conversation with Frank is over – and so too is the period of their life which inspired it.

With this simple scene, Connors and writer, Belinda Lopez secure their audience's emotional investment in the story. Although we come to know Frank and Evelyn, in their fading twilight years, we already understand the rich tapestry of the life they built together. As we watch them struggle to maintain their connection with one another over the next 90 minutes, we are all too aware of how much they have already lost.

Occasionally, the audience has the privilege of glimpsing Frank through Evelyn's eyes, a joyful man with a mischievous streak. But for the majority of the play we see him as their daughters, Sharon and Miranda do. To them, Frank is a man who cannot speak, move or take care of himself.

The complex script allows room for each character to earn the audience's empathy. Sharon is visibly torn between her responsibilities to her parents and her own children while Miranda – who lives in New York- is only just learning of the severity of her mother's dementia. The story doesn't invite judgement of either sister, neither of whom are prepared for the gravity of the situation they find themselves in. Instead of preaching the virtues of taking care of ageing relatives, *The Window Outside* explores the sacrifices that families make to do so.

Even for those of us who have not had to manage end of life discussions with family members, *The Window Outside* depicts achingly familiar conflicts and resentments. There seem to be no answers in the search for the best way to care for Frank and Evelyn. Sharon is already at breaking point, Miranda lives too far away and Frank and Evelyn want to remain in control of their destiny, and their dignity.



Ian Rooney and Carrie Moczynski in *The Window Outside*. Image via Sassy Red PR

The four cast members each deliver strong performances, equally sharing the weight of such a heavy story.

Carolyn Moczynski transitions seamlessly between Evelyn's moments of lucidity and confusion. Likewise, Ian Rooney smoothly switches between presenting Evelyn's view of Frank and the man in the wheelchair. His performance gives the audience the key to understanding the rift between the present and the family's glorious past.

The two younger actors, Julie-Anna Evans and Antonia Mochan match Rooney and Moczynski in the strength of their performances. Evans and Mochan play off each other beautifully, duelling as only sisters know how. As their characters struggle to balance their own needs against those of their parents, the two actors succeed in opening the audience's hearts to their respective dilemmas.

Ultimately, *The Window Outside* is a complex portrait of a family negotiating its way through challenging circumstances. It's both confronting and thought provoking, and will hopefully open conversations about planning for end of life.

The Window Outside is presented by Dying with Dignity Victoria and continues its run at the Northcote Town Hall this weekend. Throughout October it will tour Moorabbin, Geelong and Warragul. Wherever you decide to watch it, bring tissues.