

Skills of the dance hold true

THE essence of genius is one of those mystifying, elusive elements that defies description, so it is always going to be difficult to translate such a life into theatrical terms.

Writer/director Sally Richardson and her creative team use a multimedia approach in *I am Nijinsky* — her latest theatrical project — in a brave attempt to surmount this problem.

That it succeeds at all is remarkable.

Nijinsky, who succumbed to mental illness at the age of 27, became a legend in his own lifetime.

Add to this the fact that he was said to hover in the air, and was referred to as the dancer who didn't come down with the music, and it is obvious the subject matter is not at all easy.

But, in Stefan Karlsson, Richardson has chosen one of the few dancers who could even attempt to portray Nijinsky.

And her selection of Margrete Helgeby as his co-performer is equally inspiring.

Gary Chard's black and white set uses angles and perspective to advantage.

However, the whole depth of the stage area is not visible from the side seating in PICA's performing space.

GLIMPSES of Nijinsky's most famous performances can be seen in Susan Peacock's choreography.

There is the puppet Petrouchka, the faun from *L'Après Midi*, and the raw animal magnetism of *Sacre du Printemps*.

All these are exquisitely performed by Karlsson and Helgeby.

The program gives no clues as to Helgeby's character but I assumed she was part of the spirit of Nijinsky — maybe, at times, his conscience or his imagination.

Claire Jones (wife Romola) and Boris Radmilovich (impresario and lover, Diaghilev) complete a strong cast and also double as minor characters.

At 75 minutes I found the material was stretched too thinly.

The rather indulgent use of material from Karlsson's own life began taking away from the impetus of Nijinsky's descent into despair.

The dancing is stunning, the character interpretations mainly first class. A little more work on the script could take *I am Nijinsky* into the realms of excellence.

— ALISON FARMER