

The migrant experience

Perth playwright Vasso Kalamaras is returning her critically acclaimed play 'The Bread Trap' to the stage under the direction of Boris Rodmilovich in association with the Black Swan Theatre Company and Playhouse Theatre. A superb cast and artistic team line-up promises to make it an unforgettable night out. Vicki Aristidopoulos writes.

VASSO Kalamaras resonates. Her vibrant and enthusiastic attitude to life is contagious. Speaking to her from her home in Perth where she has been living since migrating from her birthplace Athens Greece since 1950, Vasso like many immigrants has a story to tell.

"This story is relevant to all immigrants, irrespective of generation. It shows us how to increase our understanding of the challenges migrants faced when they left their homelands," she says.

Since migrating to Australia, Vasso has taught Modern Greek for 22 years and has been writing since the 1950s. Not only is she a writer of plays but also of short fiction, poetry and novels published in English and Greek. Her work has been included in numerous anthologies in Australia and around the world.

'The Bread Trap' is about a family of migrants involved in tobacco growing in Manjimup in the 1950's. It portrays a family of farmers as they grapple to understand how their life has changed since leaving the native Greece in search of a better life. Unable to 'feed' on the root culture with the inherited moral and ethical standards of a past time and place, their spiritual integrity suffers making them extremely vulnerable and painfully exposed to the harshness of life in the 'new world'.

The play examines intensely the intimate portrayal of a Greek family of five. It reveals the depth of despair they fall into when

experiencing the painful friction that develops when the old ways and the old-world come into direct conflict with the younger generation and the new world's economic reality.

"It is a true story I wrote with creativity and imagination. I wanted to explain the suffering of immigrants," she said.

"In the 1950's there was war in Greece, it was difficult."

The title of Vasso's play, 'The Bread Trap' symbolises the paradox of the migrant experience.

"On the one hand we left our country to do better for the family, to earn our bread, a living. But this also lead to tragedy. Nobody who immigrated imagined how bitter sweet it would be to go to another place and start another life. My aim with 'The Bread Trap' was to portray the real culture of migration. Culture that comes after years and maturity. The spiritual culture that we can give to Australia and Australia give to us. It's a beautiful combination. Australia has honoured me by putting my play on stage in English, in the best theatre and the best company all this great things that they can merge two different cultures," Vasso said. The 'Bread Trap' is being produced with the assistance and support of Big Bell Theatre, in association with Black Swan Theatre Company at Perth's prestigious Playhouse Theatre.

"I want the young ones to come and see and to let us know what they think by giving us comments to partici-



pate by telling us there experience as young ones. I hope my play will help

younger children by increasing their understanding of their immigrant parents or grandparents' journeys," she said. 'The Bread Trap' was originally written in Greek before

my own translation by myself. I believe nobody can do translation in the same way than the author because really it's not about translation, its about interpreting the feeling and mood. Many times in Greek and you can't find the same text. Translating my play in English for me is to give people who can't read and write Greek the opportunity to experience my play. I didn't want to discriminate

against any nationality." Vasso's play transcends language barriers and speaks about the immigration experience universally and from the heart.

"This is my second country, I migrated here in 1950. I wanted to share all these feelings and my experiences to other people. I write my play in very simple language to communicate to the people the way migrants speak broken English in real life."

Vasso's simple yet poetic dialogue ensures that her text isn't false. She doesn't try to intellectualise it, instead she shows it how it is in its true form.

"We all share one commonality as immigrants who have made our home in Australia, we have all learned the English language, it brings all immigrants together.

Migration is like a tree. With a new tree it is easy to plant in a new ground, but for old trees who have formed their roots, it is difficult to plant in another ground or place and to start growing again," she said.

"The Bread Trap' symbolises the paradox of the migrant experience."

Vasso decided to translate it herself in English.

"I wanted to open up my play to everybody, so I did



The Bread Trap is currently showing in Perth. It will be performed at the Playhouse Theatre, 3 Pier Street, Perth until 28 July.