



The Andersen Project

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Sydney Theatre, Walsh Bay.

Often described as an alchemist of contemporary theatre, French - Canadian performer Robert Lepage last visited Sydney in 2001 with *The Far Side of the Moon*. That show blew audiences away and his latest offering is even better. Inspired by the life and work of Hans Christian Andersen, *The Andersen Project* has Lepage once again taking on the roles of writer, director and performer.

It features his unique flair with the visual and he continues to push the boundaries of theatre with the use of new technology. A highly imaginative theatrical feast is created with words, videos, three dimensional images, sounds, silences, puppets, and Lepage the performer, playing several characters. It's a oneman show sustained for two hours without an interval, and the hours pass way too soon.

The Andersen Project has a series of narrative threads which include a modern day story that begins in the seedy cubicles of a Parisian sex shop before moving back in time to Andersen's trip to the World's Fair in

Paris in 1867 and his fairytales *The Shadow* and *The Dryad*.

It was originally created for a Festival in Denmark to mark the bicentenary of Andersen's birth and Lepage says that in researching the show he found parallels between the Scandinavian writer's life and his own.

They include a feeling from early childhood of being different to others, a feeling that can lead to suffering and isolation. This show revisits some of the frequent themes in Lepage's work such as the search for sexual fulfilment and the lonely existence of an artist. He provides us with a sympathetic portrayal of characters struggling with the big picture stuff.

We feel for the writer who gets sacked from his gig after travelling to another country to pursue it. While he's away his girlfriend who's about to turn 40 and desperately wants to have children leaves him for his best friend and the dog he's meant to be babysitting runs away from him at the local park.

An inventive and engaging piece of theatre, easily the highlight of the Festival so far.