



Metro



STAGE Theatre Review: Gloria

By Frances Morton · On November 24, 2013

Gloria
The Vintage Collective
TAPAC
November 23, 2013

Amy Waller lovingly brings her grandmother's true story to the stage in *Gloria*, a heartfelt portrayal of the excitement and anxiety of life in Auckland during War World II. The solo show cuts back and forth in time, piecing together the events that have led to Gloria awkwardly giving a private baking lesson on how to make "bland" Kiwi date scones to disapproving company in her new home of Cincinnati. It's a clever structure for a work rooted in a collection of memories. Gloria married an American soldier after a whirlwind romance and ended up a solo mother in Auckland while the beau she barely knew was shipped off on service, unseen for two years. They were later reunited in his home country, but not before Gloria put up some resistance.

It's clear what drew Waller to create this tribute to Gloria. She is an easy character to love – feisty, artistic and passionate – and it's intriguing to see her intimate domestic plight against the wider context of WWII when men were the heroes off overseas and women left at home to support and worry. However, it wasn't all wringing of handkerchiefs. Gloria did her share of keeping calm and partying on and Waller injects the show with lively swing dancing set to the pounding music of the era. Movement plus excellent sound and lighting design contribute hugely to the production, which is heavy on expositional story telling. Waller has an appealing stage presence in her period flippy frock and victory rolls but has to work hard to find emotional depth. Constantly talking to an imagined cast of shadowy supporting characters lacks the spark of impulsivity that interplay between real actors brings and her delivery can feel laboured. A fond moment between Gloria and her new husband who is represented simply by a uniform hat touchingly conjures up their relationship and a terse conversation over morning coffee in Cincinnati illustrates how trapped and miserable she has become, yet her precious son's presence remains vague and conceptual.

Gloria's story, while unique in it's particular details, is far from exceptional. There are thousands of tales of love, war, suffering and personal drama buried away in bottom-drawer journals and greying memories in Auckland. Some families preserve them, many don't. Amy Waller and her sister Catherine have tenderly captured a slice of their own heritage in a formative period in our nation's history.

Until November 30

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FRANCES MORTON
Frances is Metro's arts editor.

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