



John Muirhead as renowned scientist Richard Feynman in "QED".

## THEATRE

# Tedium in the name of science

## "QED"

Written by Peter Parnell. Directed by Caroline Stacey. Designed by Kaoru Alfonso. Sound design and percussion by Gary France. Presented by The Street Theatre. The Street Studio until July 22.

Reviewed by Jorian Gardner

WHILE Caroline Stacey has directed a visually captivating, imaginative production of Peter Parnell's award-winning play about the scientist Richard Feynman, the show fails to deliver on its promise as the actors are dragged down by an over-written script.

It is Stacey's first production at The

Street Theatre as artistic director and new CEO.

In 1999, when "Physics World" polled scientists around the globe to rank the greatest physicists that ever lived, Feynman came in seventh, just behind Galileo.

He won the Nobel Prize in 1965 for his work on quantum electrodynamics (QED), worked on the creation of the atomic bomb in the '50s and was integral in the conclusions drawn from the NASA Challenger disaster.

He contracted cancer in later life, leading to an analysis of himself which we see in this play. Parnell tries to cover too much ground. I would have preferred a sharper focus on some of the more interesting events in Feynman's life which would have saved unnecessary scenes that made the production drag.

The strength of this show lies in the wonderful set design and multimedia elements put firmly centre stage by Kaoru Alfonso. The set is painted bright white to allow multi-layered projections, a nice change in the Street's studio space, and the glass doors at the back of the stage are also used as a large screen.

The space comes alive as the actors play their roles in front of projections mixed with the amazing sound design played live by sound designer and percussionist Gary France. France's score is intelligent and sometimes surprising, but always complementary to the action on stage. It was a joy

to listen to and watch. The technicals work beautifully in this show – lights, music, voice-overs and projections.

John Muirhead has a difficult task to carry this piece. The veteran talent never seemed to warm completely to the role of Feynman, and given that he had some unnecessary monologues to get through, it is unsurprising that he lost my emotional involvement and attention through several passages during the performance.

Muirhead kept a steady level though the two-a-half hours, so when he did go from one emotional point to another, it was like a rocket taking off too quickly – there was no mid point or rise in tension. He didn't quite capture that special something to define the character of Feynman and his performance meandered to its final conclusion, rather than rising to a steady crescendo that would have been far more intense.

Justine Campbell provided welcome relief, if only to see another performer in the small space, when she finally appeared on stage as student Miriam Field. Her performance failed to lift Muirhead's pace and she was relegated to a forgettable performance.

With better words, these actors could have been far more powerful, but they were doomed by the pedestrian material. It's worth a look just for the production and directing elements which are very strong.