

## Nowra's well-crafted drama is a treat to watch

### SUMMER OF THE ALIENS

**N**ARRATION is a risky business. It's all very well when the passage of time eases the audience into the anti-naturalism of a Greek chorus or the sheer power of an actor's voice allows an almost instrumental solo. But in a new play based on the shared memories of Australia in the 1960s, it is a dangerous row to hoe, and especially so when the narrator is also both author and, in a semi-autobiographical sense, subject.

So it is a treat to watch playwright and narrator Louis Nowra rise to the challenge with the warm presentation of a storyteller speaking his own well crafted words in the Melbourne Theatre Company's *Summer of the Aliens* which opened last week at the Russell Street Theatre.

It will be even better when Nowra relaxes into the role and gets rid of the stiltedness which betrays his

unfamiliarity and nerves under the lights. Nowra is the linchpin of a lovely piece of Australian theatre, his own growing up story on a harsh outer suburban housing estates in the height of Cold War politics and UFO fever.

He weaves in and out of an otherwise naturalistic drama, looking fondly on his young self and defying the theatrical convention that you are either acting or you're not, on the strength of his sensitive writing.

The drama itself is less adventurous but very satisfying, largely thanks to two immensely capable young

actors, Tamblyn Lord as young Lewis and Kylie Belling as his abused and spirited playmate, Dulcie. Both capture the ambiguity of early adolescence magnificently.

Lewis is obsessed by aliens, Dulcie by angels, but

both use their imaginings in a very down to earth way, to cope with the cruel and apparently senseless adult world they inhabit.

Their parents and the associated figures on the housing estate with long shadowed names like Gallipoli and Singapore Street fill the stage with a real sense of a whole society.

All this is good, if occasionally a little sentimental or obvious, but it is made better by the strong set.

Trina Parker has given Nowra the greatest gift of the production, an immensely striking, vast set with all the power of a stark Andrew Wyeth painting. Against this power, a very good play is moved onto another plane.

It makes *Summer of the Aliens* a very happy marriage of play and production.

*Deborah Stone*