

# Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 REVIEW : How to Keep Time: A Drum Solo for Dementia\*\*\*\*

'When we drum together it's like we're having a conversation through time...it doesn't make much sense if there's only one drummer.'



Antosh Wojcik's grandfather has vascular dementia. When Antosh visits him in hospital, he tries to reach the person Jadek once was. He tries talking to him about his life, but he also tries what he knows best – drumming. In *How to Keep Time: A Drum Solo for Dementia* Antosh delivers a touching and multi-layered solo performance that asks us to consider

the nature of memory, communication and loss.

Vascular dementia eventually affects every aspect of its victims' bodies. It's not just a case of forgetting a few things; eating, moving, and eventually swallowing and breathing become difficult and finally impossible;

'It's like re-ordering a drumkit. You try to communicate, it sounds shit.'

Antosh asks his grandfather lots of questions, his drumming becoming increasingly frantic as he tries to elicit a response. When that response does come, it is a series of unintelligible stutterings, of heart-rending failed attempts to form coherent words, attempts that are reflected in Antosh's drumming, the tempo becoming more and more stuttery

itself. Part of the tragic irony of Jadek's situation is that he used to be an electrician, someone who knew how to wire things;

'Now your machine-operating hands shake like an angsty drummer's.'

Trying and failing to jog his grandfather's memory, Antosh describes childhood memories and details of Jadek's life. We learn that he served in the Polish army, was liberated from a labour camp and ended up marrying Antosh's *babcia* and raising their family in Reading. There are poignant references to Babcia's cooking ('garlic and more garlic'), to family Christmases, to Jadek introducing Antosh to gardening, and to the bond that clearly existed between the two of them – a bond that Antosh is desperate to maintain. Sometimes – often – he jokes in an attempt to jolly Jadek along; in a very funny voice/drum riff he muses on what it will be like when he and his metal-head friend Matt end up in a care home ('No more of that *My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean* – "do you remember when we were in the mosh pit Matt?"')

Yet, just when we are all laughing at Antosh's sharp and witty repartee, he pulls us up short. The drums fall silent, and Antosh cries 'CAN YOU HEAR ME JADEK?'

Again and again Antosh wonders where memories go. How can they be lost? Can music bring them back? Can anything? The drums become the fading sound of Jadek's breaths, the sound of his heart monitor. Finally Antosh shows, in a short but beautiful speech, that he is no longer fighting against the inevitable, and as the lights fade there is a sense of peace.

*How to Keep Time* is a moving, thoughtful and thought-provoking piece, sensitively performed. It raises many questions about memory, speech and family relationships, and about how we can come to terms with loss. It's a show that stays with you; it rewards quiet reflection.

***How To Keep Time: A Drum Solo for Dementia*** is at Summerhall (Venue 26) at 10.15am daily until 26 August (no performance 20 August). Tickets are available from the venue or via the Fringe Box Office [here](#).



During his stay in Edinburgh Antosh has been working with **Vintage Vibes**, a charitable partnership between LifeCare Edinburgh and The Broomhouse Centre that tackles isolation and loneliness among over-60s in Edinburgh. Vintage Vibes offers one-to-one visiting in and outside the home, hospital visiting, pet visiting/therapy at home/hospice, nursing home, family visiting and friendship pools. Find out more about Vintage Vibes [here](#).

*How to Keep Time: A Drum Solo for Dementia* is a production of London-based literary arts company Penned in the Margins and Liverpool-based literature and arts collective Mercy.