



Kate Mulvany's warmth and generosity come to the fore in a performance that is heavily reliant on audience participation.

# Light touch shines in a dark world

## THEATRE

### EVERY BRILLIANT THING



Belvoir Street Theatre, March 13

Reviewed by **JOYCE MORGAN**

Ice cream. Things with stripes. The colour yellow. Staying up late.

When a mother attempts suicide, her seven-year-old daughter makes a list of everything wonderful in life. She hopes it will sustain her troubled mother.

This finely crafted solo show achieves the seemingly impossible, a play about suicide and mental illness that is funny and life-affirming.

The audience is integral to the show, performed in the round with the house lights on. Members read out cards with brilliant things written on them – hairdressers who listen to what you want, bubble wrap, the smell of old books.

Some patrons take on cameo roles: the girl's father, a vet, her boyfriend and Tracey the sock puppet counsellor.

It might sound like a theatre-goer's nightmare, but rarely has audience involvement worked so successfully to enhance a play's themes and invest in its story.

That it does is due in great measure to Kate Mulvany's warmth, generosity and nimbleness as a performer. She is one of our most versatile and gifted artists.

In a play so reliant on audience response, the unexpected can happen. On opening night that included a young man whose trousers split at a crucial moment. Mulvany rolls with whatever comes, addresses the audience directly mostly without the artifice of a fourth wall and makes light work of a demanding role.

Shifting seamlessly though time and tone, she begins as an

uncomprehending child facing her first encounter with death; cradling her dog Sherlock Bones he is about to be put down.

She becomes a teenager, a shy university student, a young lover and married woman. She finds joy with her father in their shared love of music – preferably played on vinyl – and in the ever-growing list that reflects adolescent (Christopher Walken's hair) and mature pleasures (waking up late with someone you love).

But the list of brilliant things is like a trail of breadcrumbs leading through a forest of heartbreak.

As the list grows, so do her mother's suicide attempts. And when the mother eventually takes her own life, it is with a blank piece of paper beside her. It is one of the saddest images – as if she cannot find even one brilliant thing to nourish her.

By then the black dog has bitten

her daughter's heels. She faces her own mental deterioration and the breakdown of her marriage.

The play, by the UK's Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe, is not about causes or pat solutions on Post-it notes. It is about the reality of suicide and mental illness. Few of us have gone untouched by the suicide of a loved one. Mulvany is no exception, as she outlines in a moving program note.

The piece, directed by Kate Champion and co-director Steve Rodgers, is staged with minimal props, most of which – from pens, chocolates and books – are provided by the audience. Help, it implies, is at hand.

This is a piece that demands we pay attention. To ourselves, the person in the next seat, across the aisle and beyond, and to the small things that bring joy. Brilliant.

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