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Theatre review: MacIvor channels, transcends Gray

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One-man show takes risks

When New York writer and performer Spalding Gray ended his life by jumping off the Staten Island Ferry on Jan. 11, 2004, Cape Breton-born writer and performer Daniel MacIvor felt like he'd lost a kindred spirit.

Both men are erudite storytellers, and both rely on an audience to hear their tales, blended together from truth and fancy, made larger than life with simple theatrical tools like lights, sound and projections.

But there are also differences. MacIvor's one-person performances make full use of the space of the stage; Gray traditionally sat behind a table or desk with a spiral-bound notebook.

Sometimes in his performance, created with Daniel Brooks and Iris Turcott, MacIvor breaks the fourth wall — in this instance, he picks an audience member for a pre-show Q&A and later a dance — while Gray kept his distance behind the desk.

And, most importantly, MacIvor's work displays a zest for life, while in Gray's case it was clearly weighing him down, especially after a 2001 car crash only deepened his struggles with depression.

Their work is different, but with the same results of generating an emotional response, and when MacIvor does sit behind a table with a spiral-bound notebook, microphone and glass of water, you sense his discomfort.

He doesn't stay there long; besides Gray's story, he's also relating his own experience of travelling to San Francisco to see a psychic surgeon about removing a parasitic "entity," and a fable about a man named How who hires a hitman to end his life with unforeseen consequences.

There's also some commentary from the sidelines courtesy of Helena Bonham Carter, but you'll have to see that for yourself.

MacIvor doesn't have all the answers, and sometimes all the parts don't fit together so neatly, but it's hard not to get swept up in his message that life is what you make it, but it's sad when some can no longer take it.