

Solitude  
by DramaLAB  
Tuesday, 2nd May, 2017  
Nelson Fringe Festival  
Refinery Artspace

Reviewed by Lisa Allan

When she wrote to Aunt Daisy and told her how much her radio show meant to her. When Aunt Daisy began to include her in her good morning spiel. This was when my emotions got the better of me. Connection. Acknowledgement. Kindness. These were things that Annie Chaffey did not have before Asbestos Cottage.

*Solitude* is the latest piece of theatre by DramaLAB, a theatre company based in Takaka. The show is biographical and tells the story of how Annie Chaffey came to spend 40 years living in the isolated cottage in Kahurangi National Park and offers up a depiction of what this experience might have been like.

*The smell of mountains and trees and freshness and freedom.*

For those who aren't familiar with the name Annie Chaffey, she was an old-timey woman who lived in Timaru. A woman who was slowly suffocating as her violent husband tightened his grip on her life. Hope came in the form of Henry Chaffey and Annie was spirited away to Asbestos Cottage. She left her husband, her children, her life. She stepped into the unknown, the courage that comes from desperation pushing her forward.

*Solitude* is storytelling at its finest. Writer, director and performer, Martine Baanvinger, is utterly compelling, humorous and breathtakingly honest as Annie. She has crafted a script that explores the concept of solitude and eloquently compares this with what it is to be lonely. Martine captures my attention right from the start. Her words flow like water, tracing their way back through time and gushing into the present. Her physicality is spot on. Her movements add another dimension to the storytelling, colouring the scenes and painting vivid pictures. The packhorse is an image that remains!

Sound is important in this piece and credit is due to Mark Manson who created music and soundscapes that amplified mood and filled the space and to the technician Rowena Dixon, who operated the lighting and sound flawlessly.

This play is currently on tour. I highly recommend getting along to see it. Not only is this an interesting New Zealand story but it is told by an expert in an incredibly imaginative and touching way. You can find more information at [www.dramalab.co.nz](http://www.dramalab.co.nz).