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The Road to Nowhere by Sean Cook

Warehouse Phoenix Ashcroft Theatre from 02 October 2013 to 05 October 2013

Review by [Howard Loxton](#)



Derek Wright as Gurth, Kit Benjamin as Geoff, Mr Noodles as Stan (the cat) and Susie Emmett as Denise picture: Mitsuko Oda

Geoff lives in a house on the edge of a cliff on the Isle of Wight but it wasn't always like that. It used to be inland but for years the cliff's been crumbling into the sea, just like Geoff's life. He lost his wife some years ago. She was a naturalist and was naked doing some pruning when she went over the edge. At least that's what he tells visiting gardener Denise, though it is not quite clear what happened. There used to be more houses and a road but now it leads to nowhere.

However, bleak though the prospects are, this play, here getting its world première, is decidedly a comedy.

It has two strands. One is a chain of reminiscence as Geoff (Kit Benjamin) tells his companion Stan about his happy days at the holiday camp that used to be just down the road. He went there with his dad when he was just a little lad, got himself a part time job and loved it. Through his first kiss, his crush on a dancer twice his age when he was 12, he moves on to his adult years working there among the other Greencoats and entertainers, incidents that recall his embarrassing propensity to get erections, a string of rose-tinted memories that avoid contemporary realities. Director Ted Craig gives his production a surreal setting. Martin Thomas's set is a single wall angled across the stage. It is covered with a montage of images, a mass of photographs of happy campers and entertainers, memories that reach backwards into the shadows and the darkness behind them. It is pierced by a single door with a cat flap that Stan (yes, he's a cat) won't risk using. The extraordinary sparseness of the furnishings of Geoff's home is presumably a symbol of the emptiness of his present life as he sits talking in a pool of light oblivious to the sound of the waves and the occasional crashes of another piece of cliff into the sea.

But this isn't a one-man show. Geoff's monologue is repeatedly interrupted by the visits of his friends: gardener Denise (Susie Emmett) and elderly neighbour Gurth (Derek Wright). The lights go up when they arrive but, the action moves in real time now, Stan stays immobile, even when he gets stroked or has his chin tickled. This marmalade moggy is both lazy and lacking in charisma.

Denise, to whom Geoff is becoming increasingly close, was a camp colleague and Gurth, a former entertainer there, is camp anyway. His house is crumbling too and the council is in the process of moving him into a new home on a local housing estate, a place where Geoff says he'll refuse to go (though once again there are things he's hiding).

Gurth too lives largely in the past, remembering past triumphs as an actor in the remote recesses of rep and playing in panto before he settled into being a holiday camp entertainer and recalling boys he liked the look of. Wright's frail Gurth, carefully negotiating each step forward as he pops in to share a tippie, is a delightful mixture of prissy propriety and full-frontal frankness. He imbues what could so easily slip into caricature with real humanity while making sure he gets every laugh. Demoted from Abanazer to the Emperor in an amateur *Aladdin*, we share the trauma of a broken catheter even as we find it funny, even though others report it, so firmly does he establish his character.

Of course, the sea wins in the end—and Craig stages that with style but it is not quite the end, for Denise provides a final touch of pathos and Sam finds a new home.

The Road to Nowhere was the front runner in this year's International Playwriting Festival, the annual new writing showcase, presented by Croydon's Warehouse Theatre until its closure. It is now produced by Warehouse Phoenix. Entries are still being accepted for the 2014 International Playwriting Festival. (deadline 31 October 13)