

Theatre

Pain, The Arches, Glasgow

Ann Donald

THE seeds of this momentarily powerful solo *tour de force* may have been planted three years ago as part of the NVA organisation's Sabotage project, but my how they have flourished.

Pain is a truly magnetic work by Graham Cunnington logging his personal account and penetrating exploration of 34 years with chronic rheumatoid arthritis.

Directed by NVA's Angus Farquhar this production elevates the once dirty term "multi-media" into deservedly respected realms. Surrounded by an open-ended room composed of three screens on to which a virtual-reality and sporadic-graphic "verbal" commentary is mounted, the fluid, muscular torso of Cunnington is silhouetted while his monologue rips inside a disturbing catalogue of childhood memories at the root of his illness.

From the opening silhouette of a suspended embryonic Cunnington that burns acid deep into the memory, to the crescendo of Marxist visuals that accompanied his involvement with the physical hard-core band Test Dept, the audience's compulsion to

watch and listen is unquestionable.

Cunnington presents himself bare and vulnerable: the child who witnessed his mother's dramatic death, the school child bullied for his distorted "penguin" walk, the medical specimen to be poked and experimented upon.

Yet beyond this unsettling dissection of the lacerating pain and throbbing, burning bone inflammation, there is the undeniable rooftop shout of personal rebellion.

What this performer succeeds in demonstrating is the relentless personal will and defiance of the individual to become a victim, and concedes to the outer failings of his body.

Cunnington not only draws the audience into his battle and past the role of the collective voyeurs (often stained with streaks of gallows humour) but, far more sustaining, proffers a vision of hope. His standing ovation was truly deserved.