



Nevin stars in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a Sydney Theatre Company production directed by Cate Blanchett, which runs at the Canberra Theatre Playhouse from July 2-5. Nevin says writer Joan Didion has captured the unique character of grief in her one-woman show.

well, it was probably too much. I mean it wore me out.” And the toil affected her output. “I certainly think that some of my work was compromised by just the range of activities that I had to cover.”

The range of activities – from manager to artiste – seemed inherently incompatible and Nevin says she questioned whether her training as an actor was being modified “by the development of the other side of my brain”.

“Actors need to be very free to play, they have to be able to drop all their masks and just be as free and open and vulnerable to whatever may happen on the rehearsal floor in that extraordinary process that is rehearsal,” Nevin says. “And managers have to wear masks, I think, [be] competent to meet whatever crises may occur during the day and they have to be mature and capable of making speeches and making important decisions that effect other people. So they’re quite often in opposition.”

She relishes being able to focus on *The Year of Magical Thinking* – “What is new is not running the company and having a night job as well, so to speak” – as well as the experience of being directed by Cate Blanchett.

“We’ve got to know each other very well and I invited her to direct this because I thought she would have the right kind of sensibility for it, and that was so.”

It was a busy time for Blanchett, one in which she was creating on personal as well as professional fronts.

“It was a hairy time because she was very pregnant but it was very good. She’s a natural collaborator, Cate. She likes to collaborate with people and it was very easy and just a good, organic process.”

What was daunting for Nevin was that she would be on the stage alone, accompanied only by Didion’s heart-rending and beautiful words.

“The play in a way gives permission for people to grieve as they will. Grief is a very individual experience. There’s no proper or appropriate or conventional way to grieve and there’s no time limit or set time at which you should be grieving.”

“It was daunting, the piece itself was daunting because it’s 90 minutes of just me and I was concerned mainly that I and others would get bored with that.”

That hasn’t transpired and instead audiences and critics have applauded the production, perhaps due to a story that inspires us to cherish relationships while we have them.

Throughout *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion refers to words her husband used to say: “‘Must you always have the last word,’ John said when we fought. ‘Must you always be right. For once in your life just let it go.’”

She laments that ultimately she is the one who has to let it go.

“Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it. We know that someone close to us could die. We might expect to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be oblitative, dislocating to both body and mind. We might expect to be prostrate, inconsolable, crazy with loss. We do not expect to be literally crazy – cool customers who believe that their husband is about to return and may need his shoes,” she writes.

But one day, Didion has to accept that he won’t be coming back and never again will wear his shoes.

Eighteen months after the death of her father, on August 26, 2005, Quintana Dunne Michael died from acute pancreatitis in a New York hospital. She was 39. Her ashes are interred alongside her father’s in St John the Divine Cathedral in New York.

As Didion says in her play, “We all know that if we are to live ourselves there comes a time when we must relinquish the dead, let them go, keep them dead. For once in your life just let it go. Let them become the photograph on the table. Let them become the name on the trust accounts. Let go of them in the water.”

■ *The Year of Magical Thinking* at the Canberra Theatre Playhouse, July 2-5. Tickets: \$60, concession \$53, U27 \$35, child \$22. Bookings: 6275 2700 or www.canberratheatre.org.au

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