



The HERALD

November 23, 1998

Pain, Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow Mary Brennan

THE performance ends – and we applaud, loud and long, in an outpouring of gratitude. Grateful to Graham Cunnington for sharing with us, not just the raw edge of his lifetime's pain, but also his way through that pain, to an acceptance of it that is both positive and inspirational.

But inwardly grateful, too, that we can get up and stroll away from it.

We can overcome the momentary stiffness brought on by awkward chairs, can meander home at our own pace – not for us the having to stop every 10 steps, wait 15 or 20 or more minutes between each spasm of mobility. We can laugh, as we are meant to, when Graham – describing one attempted shopping trip where his legs had continually seized up – had reckoned “at this rate it would take me two-and-a-half years to get home”. By then, it's a true relief to laugh – a relief to know that Graham himself has won through against setbacks and anguish, has confronted mental and physical agonies, and can now embrace the struggle in black humour.

This is not to say that he is free of his disease; the chronic rheumatoid arthritis that has assailed him since earlier childhood still inhabits his thirtysomething body, just as the childhood memories of his mother's sudden death, of being bullied at school, of being treated like a research oddity by medical staff, still inhabit his heart and mind. But what shines out of Graham Cunnington, what makes this autobiographical mixed-media solo performance so toweringly fine, uplifting, life-enhancing, is this man's refusal to be a victim. Don't on any account duck out of seeing this, fearing it to be a sorry whinge for pity, it's anything but. Catch this NVA touring production at the Traverse this Thursday through to Sunday.