

Crutchley enthralled as he proceeds to spin Charlotte's web

I AM MY OWN WIFE

DIRECTOR: Janice Honeyman
CAST: Jeremy Crutchley
VENUE: The Golden Arrow Studio, The Baxter Theatre
UNTIL: 19.30 every night until August 15
RATING: ★★★★★

TERESA SMITH

FROM THE moment he decorously opens the door till he quietly shuts it behind him, Jeremy Crutchley has the audience hanging onto his every word, as German transvestite Charlotte van Mahlsdorf.

This two-act play is a quiet work that slowly unfolds, rewarding the

audience in small increments, with the emphasis on slow. It's a detailed performance in which Crutchley plays all 40 characters, with some frank talk, but told at a very deliberate pace.

Charlotte's museum and furniture are her obsession and prize possession, yet she (Charlotte chose a feminine identity, so let's stick to her for grammar's sake) is the museum; a living embodiment of a moment that was never meant to happen, yet miraculously did: a transvestite who survived a brutal childhood, WW II and the Cold War in East Berlin.

Ironic, then, that the exposure of Charlotte's very existence would lead to a celebrity-hood which



VERSATILE: Jeremy Crutchley takes on 40 characters, including a transvestite.

Picture: ANDREW BROWN

would be her undoing.

It's not just the sheer weirdness of Charlotte's life that makes it so fascinating, it's that Crutchley turns her into a real person, a dignified person with foibles, flaws, a sense of humour and string of pearls.

Charlotte's was a constructed

identity completely different to the one dealt her by biology or society, yet she was adamant about asserting her own identity at a time when her choice was not popular.

Since Crutchley wears a black dress all the time, the male characters are performed as

transvestite, playing around with the gender conventions we so readily ascribe to. Through the play we see Charlotte as good and bad, male and female and, in experiencing Crutchley, it gives nuances to both sides as the audience sees her as a whole person.