It must be many years since a red velvet curtain has been seen in the appealingly dilapidated Queen’s Theatre, but it suits the mannered theatrics of Fiona Sprott’s *drowning in my ocean of You*, a play for voices and crooners set at the edge of a pier and, at times, at the edge of the wits as well. In this commissioned work for State Theatre, Sprott continues the appealing mix of whimsy and angst which she delved with her character of Jezebel in the highly rated monologues *Often I Find When I am Naked* and *Partly It’s About Love…Partly It’s About Massacre* - performed by Jacqueline Linke.

This time her characters have such expressionist designations as Heroine and Mother, Handsome Man and Hero. The location is indistinct - it is Australian and at least some of the events take place in a simpler, and more secretive, time denoted by the popular romantic records of Mario Lanza. Some things are also happening in the present - a time of greater sexual forwardness but no less confusing in the emotional stakes. That we are not entirely sure is a deliberate tactic, reminding us that chronological time is irrelevant to the inner life of dream and trauma.

This play is about the ways in which events lodge in memory and in the unconscious- family experiences, rituals and disturbances. These patterns are cyclical and inter-generational - the Mother, abused by her own father, is then abandoned by an alcoholic husband and retreats into an imaginary world of romance and sentimental songs, red dresses and dance nights. The Heroine, a child when her feckless father departs, is herself shaped by her mother’s disappointments - all too evident when the tipsy young Hero serenades her at the end of pier late at night. He has no idea that her mother has just died and she has only a glimmering of the way her mother’s life has predicted her own - especially where men are concerned.

This is perilous material which could easily drown in its own ocean of melodrama but Fiona Sprott knows how to curb her Strindberg with some Seinfeld (actually, some Larry David) and director Chris Drummond, who also shares a script development credit, has maintained both the pace and balances well. Robert Cousins has added some deftly understated design touches - installing a wooden stage, sparsely furnished with a bed, a res-
taurant table and small bandstand from where composer Stuart Day pro-
vides trickling piano improvisations and Stephen Sheehan, energetic as the
MC, also pleasingly croons as the Handsome Man.

There are fine performances here - Jacqy Phillips as the difficult, dimin-
ished Mother, Colleen Cross as the withdrawn, emotionally suspicious
Heroine and Rory Walker as the Hero, incompetent as a suitor and candid
almost to a fault - all contribute strongly to the play’s success. State’s On
Site Theatre Laboratory has again delivered a new work that is theatrically
appealing and has something to say.