

The art and music lost to dementia

UnRavelled

gbhi.org until March 31

Theatre is particularly well-suited as a narrative home for science and philosophy, its audience groomed to accept density of material and complexity of thought. This new play by the American writer Jake Broder carves an emotional entry into the subject of aphasia, a form of frontal lobe dementia. This production is hosted by the Global Brain Health Institute, a research partnership between Trinity College Dublin and the University of California, San Francisco.

The play is based on the true story of a Canadian visual artist Anne Chambers, her husband Robert and the early 20th-century composer Ravel, who inspired her work. Both Chambers and Ravel were struck with aphasia in their fifties, the disease affecting their creative output, and the play deals with their connection across a century of scientific, creative and medical advance. The story is framed with fascinating material about how abstract art plays with our neurological make-up to create the aesthetic response.

Lucy Davenport and Rob Nagle play the wife and husband with finesse, gracefully luring the audience into the tragic effect of this disease on their marriage. Director Nike Doukas whips the 90-minute show along on Zoom with skill. Broder's script is cerebral in both form and subject matter, but it also has plenty of heart.