

## **Metro Scotland,**

The statistics are alarming. One in six people who attempt a Himalayan summit will not come back alive. And many, according to Scottish company Suspect Culture's incisive, ambitious new play 8000m, will not return at all – stepping over corpses being a hazard of climbing peaks more than 8,000m high.

So why do it? Why endure the altitude sickness, extreme cold, abject fear and ultimately, death, just to stake your flag at the peak?

Director Graham Eatough and writer David Greig tackle this eternal question with customary panache – leading us on a fictional expedition up the slopes of Lhotse, and 8,000m peak next to Everest, and through the ambitions and emotions of six very different climbers.

Selina Boyack gives tense, steely life to the fiercely driven Ice Climber, while John Macauley plays the patient husband waiting at home.

Eric Barlow is The Leader, experienced but past his personal peak. Paul Blair is the gung-ho Alpinist, Catherine Keating playing his girlfriend, a rookie climber and The Writer, mustard keen to elicit poetic images from her more cynical team.

Matthew Pidgeon is wearily brilliant as the jaded camp doctor and Phil McKee is the Sponsor, fulfilling his boyhood ambition while doing his bit for Mackays Butter Cookies' Scary Biscuits ad campaign – a wonderful comic touch.

En route, the characters unfold, their motivations for being there laid bare and chewed over with every step.

Suspect Culture lifts this play from stage to the famous Peter Brook wall, creating a landscape of the imagination as the actors scale a specially created climbing wall, covered in layers of gauze and projections conjuring up Lhotse's icy face. This is a beautifully wrought play, characters and dialogue are woven in very satisfying layers. But it is the staging – the way it tips our world perspective by having the action scale unimaginable heights on Tramway's walls – that makes it remarkable.

Who needs Touching the Void's dizzying camera angles?

**Ellie Carr**