

Riverrun, National Theatre, review: An extraordinary adaptation of Finnegans Wake



★★★★★

The Shed, NT

[Paul Taylor](#)

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Olwen Fouere begins by removing her shoes and walking barefoot over a pattern of salt crystals to the microphone which is propped on a sinuously curved stand.

In a rousing unearthly drone, she intones the invocation “Sandhyas! Sandhyas! Sandhyas!” – the Sanskrit word that means the “twilight of dawn”.

And thus we are launched on *Riverrun*, her extraordinary sixty-minute solo piece that she's adapted from the last book of *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce's punning, polyglot hubbub of a novel or, in one its characteristic coinages, “traumscraft”.

Embodying the voice of the River Liffey as it journeys to the sea, Fouere brings a mesmerizing physical intensity to the shifting moods in Joyce's intricate serio-comic soundscape.

At times, it's as though the inward-looking verbal torrent in Beckett's *Not I* has been extroverted to embrace the whole of myth and human history.

Much of it is, of course, impenetrable but Fouere – with her incantatory precision and wiry, undulant presence – attunes you to the monologue's addictively ludic and allusive music.

And when the river dissolves into the sea in a mid-sentence ending (which connects on a loop with novel's first words), Fouere's rapt face seems to concentrate in that suspension all the freight of joy and sorrow that has gone before.

A prodigious feat.