

Gia On The Move

I go where art goes...everywhere

Holding The Man at the Matrix Theatre Los Angeles

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Nate Jones and Adam J. Yeend

Photo by Suzanne Strong

by Tracey Paleo, *Gia On The Move*

This past Saturday evening saw the Los Angeles opening of ***Holding the Man*** a stage adaptation by Tommy Murphy of the memoirs of deceased author and activist Timothy Conigrave.

Directed by veteran Hollywood acting coach Larry Moss, *Holding the Man* is one of Australia's most successful plays of all time and is presented

by the newly formed **Australian Theatre Company** with an all Australian cast, who have recently taken up residence on the West Coast.

Billed as a love story, *Holding the Man* also puts a direct linear timeline to real-life contemporary history that has been difficult even up till now, to tell and assimilate. Beginning in the decadent 70's, at an all-boys school in Melbourne, *Holding the Man* follows two young teenage boys who fall in love and who for fifteen years thereafter, face the consequences of being gay at a time when acceptance was very near impossible to have.

In some ways, one could say that *Holding the Man* is a story "by the numbers." These boys deal with every possible obstacle: parents who try to separate them, peers who make fun of them, teachers who "out" them, anger, discrimination, resentment, other gay men who take advantage of their naivety, distance, boredom, promiscuity, heartbreak, contracting the disease and eventually death.

Many of us have had people we've lost since the onslaught of HIV and AIDS and so the content won't be new for some. But what is exciting about this production, is HOW it is delivered and how thoroughly the story is told.



Cameron Daddo, Adam J. Yeend, Nate Jones, Luke O'Sullivan, Roxane Wilson

Photo by Suzanne Strong

Highly theatrical and energetic, absurd, shocking, and occasionally bordering on camp, this play takes the audience on a bullet-train ride from start to finish – absolutely defiant in its pacing. Although there is a lot to digest in this piece, *Holding the Man* is so beautifully simple and completely accessible. It bypasses prejudice and stigma,

playing to the surface and yet subtly penetrating beneath it, to round the whole lives of both young men, without allowing the audience to get too caught up in any emotional dribble; which is not to say that there isn't any emotion at all. Quite the contrary. It's just that *Holding the Man* is not indulgent. It allows the audience to bear witness and at the same time, understand the humanity of the piece. These boys are just ordinary boys - anywhere. No more, no less. They are not particularly special. They're just normal. That is the tragedy.

At the finale whatever resentment one might have been feeling about the lack of excess, is resolved because there has been no concession to coddle and dote on the shock of the moments until the end. Pity and other disattached sentiments fall by the wayside, leaving the audience embraced, engaged and connected with everyone involved; most of all, settled with the breathtaking, painful reality faced by their friends and family, of which the audience is also an extension. We've been there with them, "all the way."

There is the use of puppetry (designed by **Alex "Jürgen" Ferguson**) which on first look, seemed a bit extraneous. But the appearance of this particular device takes on a sort of psychologically, non-offensive, avatar-like neutrality and so it affords the audience a "way in" to the devastating imagery of the disease, without it being a sickening distraction. In other words, ultimately it works.

And there is quite a bit of Australian "speak" to comprehend. But the words and phrases seem to have been toned down from the natural language to make them easier to understand.

The character work is marvelous. The actors accomplish style and personality changes with the simplest of devices, wigs and physical behaviors inside a sparse set design; attesting to the power and effectiveness of minimal stage craft. Lead actor and narrator Nate Jones is the hands-down fearless "wonder-boy" of this production who earnestly embodies Conigrave's spirit, along with heartbreaking co-star Adam J. Yeend. Both are

uniquely captivating, genuine and appealing. Actors Cameron Daddo, Luke O’Sullivan, Adrienne Smith and Roxane Wilson, are seamless as they transition over multiple roles throughout the performance.



Adam J. Yeend and Nate Jones
Photo by Suzanne Strong

***Holding The Man** is as fresh a take on a story we are all familiar with as if it were told for the very first time. It is a poignant journey that dexterously guides the audience to a mournful end. In between, it is glorious, and gorgeous and triumphant.*

One interesting note: The play’s title refers to a transgression that incurs a penalty in Australian rules football.

“**Holding the Man**”

Adapted *by* **Tommy Murphy** from the memoir
by **Timothy Conigrave**

Directed by **Larry Moss**

Starring **Cameron Daddo, Nate Jones, Luke O’Sullivan, Adrienne Smith, Roxane Wilson, Adam**

J. Yeend

Produced by **Nick Hardcastle, Nate Jones** and **Mike Abramson**

Presented by **Australian Theatre Company**

Set Design by John Iacovelli

Lighting Design by Jeremy Pivnick

Sound Design by Cricket S. Meyers

Costume Design by Shon LeBlanc

WHEN:

Performances through June 29:

Thursday at 8 p.m.: May 15, 22, 29; June 5, 12, 19, 26

Fridays at 8 p.m.: May 16, 23, 30; June 6, 13, 20, 27

Saturdays at 8 p.m.: May 17, 24, 31; June 7, 14, 21, 28

Sundays at 3 p.m.: May 18, 25; June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

WHERE:

Australian Theatre Company@ The Matrix Theatre

7657 Melrose Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90046
(west of Stanley Ave., between Fairfax and La Brea)

HOW:

323-960-7735 or www.holdingtheman.us

TICKET PRICES:

General Admission: **\$34.99**

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