



LIVE*notes*

For students of live performance
in Tasmania

Don't Say the Words

Backspace Theatre
July 31 - August 9 2008

Written by TOM HOLLOWAY
Directed by MATTHEW LUTTON

Book at the Theatre Royal Box Office
www.theatreroyal.com.au
(03) 6233 2299



LIVE

Compiled by Maura Bedloe
for LIVE Tasmania



Tasmanian
Community Fund
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LIVE Tasmania is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to
promote the value of live performance in Tasmania.

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Tasmanian Community Fund.

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Introducing Backspace Rush Tickets

The Tasmanian Theatre Company is committed to making it easy for young Tasmanians to see excellent theatre locally without draining your wallets.

Every time the TTC performs at the Backspace Theatre, it will make \$15.00 Backspace Rush Tix available 30 minutes prior to the performance for people aged 25 and under.

Of course, we recommend that everyone books in advance to ensure they don't miss out.

Remember, student tickets for all TTC performances at the Backspace are available for just \$20.00 through the Theatre Royal Box Office right now.

But for those who want to try their luck, here's the deal:

- 1)** Backspace Rush Ticket may only be purchased by holders of valid photo identification which verifies they are 25 years of age or under.
- 2)** Holders of valid photo identification may purchase 1 ticket for themselves only (but, of course, if you bring a friend who is under 25, they have the chance to buy a Backspace Rush Ticket also!)
- 3)** Backspace Rush Tickets will cost \$15.00 per person including all fees. Not valid in conjunction with any other offer.
- 4)** Backspace Rush Tickets will be made available 30 minutes prior to the advertised commencement of each performance.

And of course...

There is no guarantee made that Backspace Rush Tickets will be available at any performance. If the show sells out in advance, that is the luck of the game.

Content Warning

This production includes frequent very strong language, representations of violence and sexual concepts.

While it is appropriate for senior students of Drama and English, it is not recommended for children under the age of 16.

“It's about how violence can exist within our most intimate relationships – not just physical violence but emotional violence – and what can happen when we get communication so wrong.” - **Tom Holloway**, playwright

Things to know before you go.

Whether you go to the theatre every week, or this is your first time, here are a few practical tips to make sure you have a great night out.

- ▶ Getting to the theatre a bit early means no queuing, so aim to arrive fifteen minutes before the show starts. On performance days, the Theatre Royal Box Office stays open until the show start time, but if you book ahead, you'll be assured of good seats. The box office is open from 9 am-5 pm each weekday and 9 am-1 pm on Saturdays.
- ▶ The Backspace Theatre is located behind the Theatre Royal. There is free, short term parking outside the theatre which is helpful when you are collecting tickets. For longer parking, Market Place Car Park is located just two minutes walk from the theatre, or you can try your luck with a meter park on the street.
- ▶ Actors love audiences who give them the best environment to perform. It's hard for performers to concentrate with lots of noise going on...so when the play has started make sure you laugh in the funny bits and cry in the sad bits, but talk about it at interval.
- ▶ You can text your friends and they can call you – before and after the play. People may not be very excited to hear your Kanye West ring tone right in the middle of the sad scene in act two, so make sure you turn your phone off before you go into the theatre. Cameras and recording devices are best left at home too.
- ▶ You may want to take notes during the performance, but the house lights will be out, and no lights are allowed in the audience, so it might be better to take a few minutes after the play to write down all the things you can remember while it's fresh in your mind.
- ▶ You may have never thought of it like this before – but you are an important part of the performance you're about to see, just like the actors, director and everyone else. And just like them, if you play your part well, everyone will have a great night.



How to Use LIVEnotes

Welcome to this edition of LIVEnotes.

We've put this guide together to help you get the most out of your experience of live theatre. We'll give you some information on the play you're about to see, shine a light on some of its key elements, give you some tips on writing a critical review, and provide links to other resources that might help you out.

Why not take this guide with you to the theatre! We've provided space for you to add in your own notes during or after the performance to create one simple tool to keep with you when you start your critical review.

Seeing a play, musical or any kind of live theatre can be a fantastic experience. We hope that LIVEnotes helps you along the path to understanding and appreciating this wonderful art form. Good luck and enjoy!

www.livetasmania.com

The People Behind Don't Say the Words

Tom Holloway

Playwright



Tom Holloway is a Tasmanian born and bred playwright. He is currently Playwright in Residence at Red Stitch Theatre in Melbourne and in July 2008 his play *Don't Say the Words* premiered at Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company before touring to Tasmania. At the beginning of 2007, Tom's play *Beyond the Neck*, written

in response to the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, was one of 10 plays chosen to be part of the Royal Court Theatre's International Young Playwright's Festival in London.

Beyond the Neck premiered in Hobart in September 2007, produced by Tasmania Performs and a Bit of Argy Bargy, in a sell out season. In 2007, with the support of Arts Victoria, Holloway was one of four artists researching and developing the original cabaret *Only the Lonely*, inspired by male suicide and mental health in Australia. While in London in 2006/07 he also studied at the Royal Court Theatre's Invitational Writers Program and signed with one of the world's top agents for playwrights, Mel Kenyon at Casarotto and Ramsey Ltd.

Matthew Lutton

Director

Matthew Lutton has worked as a director for a number of Australian theatre companies including Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company for whom he is currently directing *Don't Say The Words*.

His other directorial achievements include *Tartuffe* for the Malthouse Theatre; *The Lady Aoi* for the Black Swan Theatre Company and the 2007 Perth International Arts Festival; *Woyzeck*, *The Visit*, *Mountain Language* and *Striptease* for Be Active BSX-Theatre and *The Goose Chase*, *The Gathering*, *Bed*, and *The Bald Prima Donna* for ThinIce. He has also worked as Assistant Director for Company B, the Sydney Theatre Company and the West Australian Opera.

He is also a current Board Member for the Theatre Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Artistic Director of ThinIce and is the former Black Swan Theatre Company's Associate Director and Artistic Director of their Be Active BSX-Theatre program.

Matthew's awards include Best Production at the Perth International Fringe Festival 2003 for *The Bald Prima Donna*, Best Production at the 2005 Equity Guild Awards for *The Visit*, a Young People and the Arts Fellowship from ArtsWA (2007) and Young West Australian of the Year for Arts in 2005.

Tasmanian Theatre Company



The Tasmanian Theatre Company is Tasmania's flagship professional theatre company. The Company's vision is:

'To be an icon theatre company showcasing the best of Australian and particularly Tasmanian theatre.'

To enrich Tasmania as a place to live by making, presenting and facilitating exceptional theatrical experiences with an emphasis on contemporary new work.'

The Tasmanian Theatre Company was launched in May 2008 with its first production, *Bombshells*, written by Joanna Murray-Smith and directed by Robert Jarman, which is now touring the state. *Don't Say the Words* is the TTC's second production.

Griffin Theatre Company



Sydney's Griffin Theatre Company is a not-for-profit theatre company which is

entirely dedicated to the professional development and production of new plays by Australian writers.

Each year, the company stages 4-6 new plays at the SBW Stables Theatre, and its productions regularly tour throughout Australia. Griffin also operates an education program, playwrights' residencies and Griffin Stablemates - an annual season of independent theatre productions, which offers emerging theatre artists the chance to reach audiences in a nurturing and subsidised environment.

Artists who began their professional careers at Griffin include including Cate Blanchett and Jacqueline McKenzie, and the successful films *Lantana* and *The Boys* began life as plays first produced by Griffin, as did the TV series *Heartbreak High*. Many other plays premiered by Griffin are produced regularly throughout Australia and internationally, including *Holding the Man*, *Clark in Sarajevo*, *Wolf Lullaby* and Australia's most produced play, *Away*.

The Story of Don't Say the Words.

LIVEnotes

Cast

A - Jack Finsterer

C - Anna Lise Phillips

AE - Brett Stiller

Writer Tom Holloway

Director Matthew Lutton

Dramaturg Peter Matheson

Designer Adam Gardnir

Lighting Designer Paul Jackson

Composer/Sound Designer Kelly Ryall

Synopsis

Inspired by the ancient Greek classic, *The Agamemnon*, from Aeschylus' Oresteia, *Don't Say the Words* is a dramatic work, set in contemporary Australia, which explores eternal human stories of love, jealousy, betrayal and revenge.

The play tells the story of a soldier, named A, who returns home after ten years fighting a brutal military campaign. Waiting for him is his wife, C, and best friend, AE. A lot has happened in the ten years since A has been gone, not least of which is the fact that C and AE have become lovers. As A, C and AE reunite, the horror of war will be revisited on the home front.

Little by little, what is said and what remains unsaid peels away to reveal a startling truth.

'The wheels in the gravel driveway. The door. Him coming home. I was waiting because I hadn't seen him in a long time. I hadn't been alone with him in so long...'

After a decade under siege – a city has finally fallen. But ten years of fury have taken their toll. For an officer returning from this epic campaign, it is time to put the horrors of war behind him and take back his place at the family table. For the officer's wife, it is a time to begin again.

The future is set. The real battle for hearts and minds must start now

Don't Say the Words is inspired by the classic Greek tale Of

The Agamemnon

The Oresteia is a trilogy of Greek tragedies written by the poet Aeschylus in 458BC and is the only surviving example of a trilogy of ancient Greek plays. The first part of the trilogy – The Agamemnon – concerns the return of King Agamemnon of Argos from the Trojan War. During his ten-year absence, Agamemnon sacrificed his eldest daughter Iphigenia to the gods in order to guarantee safe passage for his ship. Now, Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra awaits his return, with vengeance in her heart. In her husband's absence, Clytemnestra has taken a lover – Agamemnon's cousin, Aegisthus, who also covets the throne. To make matters worse, Agamemnon returns with the Trojan princess Cassandra, who was awarded to him after the fall of Troy, further enraging Clytemnestra.

Assisted by her lover, Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon in the bath, and also kills Clytemnestra. The play ends with the promise that Orestes, Agamemnon's son, will one day avenge his father's death.

USEFUL SITES

Visit www.livetasmania.com where we have posted links to:

- Reviews and articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*.
- Information about Tom Holloway's last play, *Beyond the Neck*.
- Griffin Theatre and the Tasmanian Theatre Company.

An Interview with the Playwright.

LIVEnotes

Tom Holloway talks with LIVE Tasmania

Maura Bedloe

Tell me a little about *Don't Say the Words* - what is it that you're trying to communicate in the play?

Well, the basic structure of the play comes from the Greek myth of Agamemnon – from the trilogy of plays by Aeschylus named *Oresteia*.

In that play, Agamemnon returns from fighting at Troy to discover that his wife, Clytemnestra, has taken a lover who is also his cousin. Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon while he's in the bath – and there are two main reasons for that. One is revenge – because on his way to Troy Agamemnon sacrificed their daughter to ensure a safe passage across the sea, and the second is out of a sense of love for her lover. When Agamemnon returns he also brings back Cassandra, who is the daughter of the king of Troy, as a trophy, the spoils of war, but she is a person who can see the future and can see the tragic end that is coming but Agamemnon doesn't listen.

The very basic story is that he returns home from war to be murdered in the bath – Clytemnestra drops a net on him and stabs him three times – and there are lots of different versions of this myth. So while this play is inspired by *The Agamemnon* – it's not an adaptation but a starting point.

What are the primary issues and themes arising from the story?

Between you and me I find that kind of question really difficult to answer – other people can answer that better than I can – maybe you should ask Nick...

For me it's a play about love, and about hate in love – a phrase linked to the original, which really grabbed me. It's about how violence can exist within our most intimate relationships, not just physical violence but emotional violence, and what can happen when we get communication so wrong.

All the characters in this play are so desperate for love but through their actions and the world they live in they have lost the ability to capture it or share it or express it.

How much involvement have you had in the production itself – beyond the writing?

I've worked with the director since about October last year but I've really wanted him and the designers and everyone to have a free reign, so I've been as hands off as I can. I think that's important for me and for them. One of the wonderful things about what I do is that it's only part of the whole process. It's become something much more than just my play.

So it wasn't difficult to let go of it?

Of course! It's always hard to let go, it is but that's what theatre is – it's the hardest thing but also one of the most important and rewarding. To see other artists respond to my work and create something so beautiful is just brilliant.

For me, theatre is an experience – it's not so much about going along to completely understand something but about experiencing something and taking from it what you will. It's equally about what the play means for the audience as what it means to me.

What do you think it means to be a Tasmanian writer?

I feel so lucky to have come from Tasmania for a whole range of reasons – the history and the landscape just begs story and theatre. And the inspiration – it's not so hard to get inspired in Hobart – I imagine it's a lot harder if you've grown up in the outer suburbs of Melbourne or Sydney or something.

The beauty and the history of Tasmania is a big part of it because the stories that are linked to the state are so powerful. Also it's place in Australia – we're part of Australia but were different to Australia – so perhaps that allows us to reflect more than if we were living in other parts of the country.

An Interview with the Playwright.

LIVEnotes

Having said all that, it has been incredibly important to me as a writer and a person to leave the island – just to get that outside perspective. Tasmania is an incredibly wonderful place but there are things you just have to leave to do – because of the population size and so on. That's not a bad thing and I still consider myself very strongly to be a Tasmanian – but to develop I've needed to leave from time to time.

Can you describe what is involved in being a writer in residence?

I'm writer in residence with a Melbourne company called the Red Stitch Actors' Studio. It's gone on for a year now and I'm developing a new play that will be produced by the studio. This is an actor ensemble, so it's actor-run and led, and I've been working with some of the actors and a dramaturg on this new work.

Is that a departure from how you've normally worked?

Not really, but it's been an excellent add-on. It's been important to me, and always a big part of my work, to get feedback and responses to my work as I'm writing it, so Red Stitch has provided a great environment and infrastructure to be able to do that.

So how has it felt to watch your play develop and to finally see it on stage in performance?

It's been incredibly exciting. I was in on the first few rehearsals and then there was four weeks of rehearsals that I didn't attend while they worked on the play – then I came back and watched a run through and it was just amazing to see what they had created from what I had written...like the play was being created before my eyes. As I said, the result is so much more than what I have on the page. And watching the audience responding has been fantastic.

Do you find yourself assessing the audience response, seeing what's working and what isn't – perhaps even thinking you'd write things differently if you had the chance to do it again?

Oh absolutely. And you know, some writers never stop developing their scripts – but for me, you just have to have a cut-off point and let the mistakes be what they are.

Notes

An Interview with the Artistic Director, Griffin Theatre Company.

LIVEnotes

Nick Marchand talks with LIVE Tasmania

Maura Bedloe

Starting at the very beginning, can you explain what is meant by a co-production?

Basically, it's a collaboration between theatre companies. Co-productions are usually intended to lower the costs of a production –but also give a production a further life so it is not just seen in one theatre. Often, small-to-medium theatre companies like Griffin and TTC can suffer because shows are expensive to produce and difficult to tour after the show has had its original life, especially if it's an edgier production

Staging a co-production allows us to share costs of things like sets, rehearsals and design with another company which essentially halves costs and also enables us to tour shows more easily.

Can you tell us a little about your co-production with the Tasmanian Theatre Company, *Don't Say the Words*?

This is a more innovative show – a production that is based on the Greek classic *Agamemnon*. The play uses that text as a departure point rather than a template, so the production is a more visceral response to the Aeschylus text rather than an attempt to adapt it.

New work is a very difficult market – audiences are used to seeing established texts from overseas that often have had many, many productions before they arrive in Australia, so most of the writer's work has been done and honed overseas before its seen in Australia. This means the standard is usually very high.

The standard of writing in Australia can also be high but if you are seeing a premiere production this may be the first time an audience sees it –it's sometimes difficult for audiences to make the mental bridge between a play that been staged many times and a new play that's been staged by a new writer.

There's a risk in staging a work that's based on a classic. Classics are not seen on stage as often as they could be, although there is a current revival of the more epic Greek dramas. Nevertheless, it's taking material that can sometimes be overwhelming for audiences.

Tom Holloway is a very, very unique type of writer in Australia at the moment. His work reminds me of Martin Crimp – more contemporary texts where the work is much more epic. This play is incredibly intricate in its design and in some ways is a play of the head rather than the heart.

These types of plays are 'essence' plays – they don't necessarily attempt to tell a straightforward narrative over 2-5 acts. They are short – between 45 minutes to an hour 10 minutes. They are often non-linear narrative and what they tend to focus on is in some ways a more sociological rather than a play of individual character development. The characters in this play of course also develop and have their own story arcs but the play has a greater concern. Our job as an audience is to discern that meaning and the essence of the play ourselves.

They are plays than ask questions of us and may frustrate us and we stand in the foyer talking about it for hours afterwards. The plays are departure points for later conversation.

Can you tell us how this co-production between Griffin and the Tasmanian Theatre Company came about?

The play came to Griffin through an annual award for a new play or performance text. I read it and loved it. It didn't win the award but I wanted it to be staged during the year. Tom subsequently worked on another couple of drafts with a dramaturg. Charles Parkinson came and heard the first reading at Griffin and responded very positively. Tom is a Tasmanian playwright and *Beyond the Neck* is well known so Charles decided very quickly that he wanted to be involved.

Tom and I first met in 2001 when he and I were both involved in a short play competition. He and I were performing together at the Stables Theatre in 2001 as

An Interview with the Artistic Director, Tasmanian Theatre Company.

Charles Parkinson talks with LIVE Tasmania

Maura Bedloe

What is the Tasmanian Theatre Company?

The biggest distinction about the Tasmanian Theatre Company is that it is a professional theatre company, and it's also the first narrative or text-based theatre company that has existed in Tasmania for 12 years.

We intend to produce a four-to-five show subscription season from 2009; we'll feature a range mostly Australian work, and we're actively looking to tell Tasmanian stories. We'll commission at least one work each year and there'll be an emphasis on new work.

Also, as a professional theatre company, the people associated with the TTC will be professional, trained and paid for what they do.

Why is it important for Tasmania to have its own theatre company?

The Tasmanian Theatre Company is a flagship theatre company. Tasmania has a really strong brand in terms of an artistic community and culture – we're very strong in literature, art, craft, design and music – so it's like the last arc of the cultural brand circle has been missing. All the other states have their own professional theatre companies and Tasmania is certainly not too small to support its own. If this was France, there would be seven of them here!

Because a professional theatre company relies on funding it agrees with the government that funds it that it will explore non-commercial productions. Staging new Australian works is not a big money making exercise – but if you were in this to make money you'd just stage old musicals! Our perspective is also that the audience deserves to see a certain standard of performance, design, staging, direction and so on.

Another point is that a professional theatre company must also pay its employees and set working conditions that conform to an industry standard, and a good company will also encourage its employees to become members of a union.

One of the biggest differences between professional and non-professional theatre is probably the number of hours of rehearsal. We will do something like four and a half weeks of full time rehearsal – that's 160 to 180 hours. It would be rare for an amateur theatre company to be able to do that.

Why are co-productions important for the Tasmanian theatre industry?

Well, it makes the cost of a production a lot less because costs are shared. In the case of *Don't Say the Words*, Griffin were very keen on the play and we were keen to do a Tom Holloway play, as he is a Tasmanian writer – so we were already looking to work with him, and we have in fact commissioned another work from Tom.

Also, the co-production with Griffin means the Tasmanian Theatre Company's name is placed in front of a Sydney audience for four weeks. The show also gets reviewed in the Sydney media and nationally – we may have six or so reviews, which you don't get when the show is staged only in Tasmania. People from the Australia Council will also see the show if it's staged in Sydney and it also gives artists from different states the chance to work together. So doing co-productions connects us with the industry nationally and that's very important.

Why did you choose this play?

This is a very contemporary piece of writing and a big contrast to the first show that we did, *Bombshells*. The writing, direction and set design is sensational, as is the sound design. It's also very contemporary in its style – and had I not known I'd have still guessed it was directed by a young director – not because of any indication of inexperience because that's not the case, but because it has a particular kind of Gen-Y feel and approach to the text – it's very fresh.

Shining a light on *Don't Say the Words.*

LIVEnotes

This section is designed to help you think critically about the production, to ask questions and to notice all the elements of live theatre, beyond the story itself.

Genre

Don't Say the Words is a contemporary dramatic play, based on an epic tale. How do you think the play sits in this genre? Is it typical of the genre, or does it mock it, send it up, deconstruct it?

While the play is a drama, there are also moments of humour. Do you think the comedy works and how comfortably does it sit alongside the drama and tragedy of the story?

Themes & Issues

Some of the themes and issues explored in this play include love, betrayal, deception, violence and honour. Can you think of others? Think about the ways in which the performances interpret or convey the themes of the play and whether you think they are successful.

Setting

Although inspired by an ancient Greek classic play, *Don't Say the Words* is set in contemporary Australia and all of the action takes place in a bathroom. Why has the playwright chosen this setting for his play? Is the setting relevant and what impact does it have in the telling of the story? Do you think the play would work if it was set in a different time and place?

Characters

Don't Say the Words has a cast of just three characters. Are these characters convincing? How well realised are they? Does the interaction between the characters make sense? Consider the three performances – how have the actors interpreted their characters? What strengths and weaknesses can you identify? Do you think the actors have succeeded in bringing these characters to life?

Motifs & Symbols

Can you identify any motifs or symbols in this play? How are they presented and what meaning to they have in the play? As an example, Griffin Theatre's Artistic Director, Nick Marchand, talks about the use of water in this play. What does it mean and why is it important?

Notes

Information About the Terms Used in This Study Guide

Critical Review

An essay or article that gives a close examination of materials and a weighing of evidence in order to discern what information is reliable and what information is less credible, considering both its merits and its shortcomings.

Genre

A term used to define literary and artistic works that share similar characteristics, ie. Comedy, Tragedy, Epic, Melodrama etc.

Theme

The main idea / underlying concept of the story, or the message the playwright is conveying. This message, for example may relate to issues concerning life, society or human nature.

Mood

The atmosphere or feeling created by a theatrical work. Mood is created by imagery, word choice, events, colours, music, time of day, etc.

Tone

The playwright's attitude toward the audience or the people, places, and events in a work. A writer can be formal, informal, playful, ironic, and especially, optimistic or pessimistic.

Motif

An recurring element, such as an image, colour, theme, idea or incident that can be found throughout the work, usually to underpin the intention of the director or playwright.

Symbol

An image, item or action that conveys underlying meaning in addition to its literal significance.

Stage Craft

Use of music, sound, lighting, sets, costumes, make up, props, media, and so on, to enhance a theatrical dance, drama, or music production; the knowledge and skills required for full-scale theatrical production.

Properties (Props)

The furniture and hand-held objects used in theatrical productions.

Setting

The location for a story's action.

Action

The progression of a story as told by the characters in a performance.

Device

In the theatre, a device is a particular use of language or style to create a special effect for a specific purpose. In the context of a play literary devices are referred to as dramatic devices. They are used to add interest and tension.

Juxtapose / Juxtaposition

To place in close proximity or side by side.

Dramaturgy

The science of dramatic composition, the dramatic art or dramatic representation. In Australia, a Dramaturge is the name given to the person who supports a writer or creative team in development of a script or story.

Scene

A division of a play or of an act of a play; the place in which the action of a play is supposed to occur.

Act

One of the main divisions of a play or opera.

Masking

Use of setting to create a space where actors can be concealed or disguised on stage.

Wings

The platform or space on the right or left of the stage, or one of the long, narrow side pieces of scenery.

Revolve

A rotating platform on the stage used to change scenery or sets.

Opera

Opera is a form of theatre in which the drama is conveyed wholly or predominantly through music and singing.

Period Piece

any work of art whose special value lies in its evocation of a historical period