

“No Nonsense” review by Colin Mockett from Entertainment Geelong

<http://www.entertainmentgeelong.com/colinmockett/Reviews.html>

(3 Screens down from top)

Unmissable play of power and eloquence

Foxholes of the Mind directed by Wolf Heidecker for Larikin Etc,

Potato Shed, August 9, 2016

This powerful play premiered at Melbourne’s La Mama in November 2010. Following a successful season - one of that venue’s best for the year - it’s author, Bernard Clancy, withdrew the work for a substantial re-write.

This Potato Shed performance was the premier of that revised work.

It had essentially the same cast, with just one change, but with a new additional character that allowed the plotline to take fresh new directions.

Essentially, *Foxholes of the Mind* explores the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (*PTSD*) especially in those Australian soldiers who returned from the 1970s Vietnam War.

They’re in their 70s now, and many are still unknowingly suffering the effects.

This play explored those effects, and causes, with raw honesty studded with darkly caustic humour.

Director Wolf Heidecker moved the action from real life to therapy session to re-lived memories, instantly and seamlessly, by using a continuous scene-flow over a simple, minimally-dressed set. And the play’s two-hour, no-interval format worked to build both understanding and tension to a low-key, believable, moving ending of quiet optimism.

A remarkable feature of *Foxholes of the Mind* is that after every performance the audience is invited to remain seated for a question and answer session with cast, director and author.

It was as a result of these sessions that author Clancy decided on the present rewrite, and there’s every possibility that current audience reactions may trigger more on-stage responses. *Foxholes of the Mind* is essentially a work in progress, and therapy for the author, whose own service in Saigon left him with undiagnosed PTSD.

His newly introduced character, Nigel, a young trainee therapist of Vietnamese-Australian descent, expanded the plot into xenophobic territory. But when it turned out that he, too, was an ex-Digger, a veteran of the Afghan war and also suffering PTSD, the storyline exploded into several more unseen, but oh-so-relevant complexities.

Prominent among the play’s audience after-show responses were, ‘Why are we still sending our young men to fight in these conflicts?’ and ‘Why do we not seem to learn from past experience?’

But that’s moving too far ahead. *Foxholes of the Mind* is based around the break-up of a dysfunctional marriage between childhood sweethearts Frank (Peter Finlay) and Trish (Joanne Davis) who had wed after Frank’s return from national service in Vietnam

She - and their children - had learned to endure his drinking and erratic, hostile and violent behaviour until she moved out of the family home, triggering his PTSD

diagnosis and subsequent group-therapy sessions. There he met Victor Gralak's knowledgeable psychologist Mark and his assistant, the aforementioned Nigel, played by David Lih.

Also on the treatment course were three other ex-Viet Vets, all played by Adrian Mulraney, and a surprise inclusion, Maureen Hartley's ex-nurse, Sheila.

Every one of these truly difficult characters was finely drawn and believably portrayed, with Peter Finley and Joanne Davis excellent in their central roles and Adrian Mulroneý's depiction of three different and contrasting characters simply outstanding.

But for all of its eye-catching acting and staging skills, the most memorable thing about *Foxholes of the Mind* was the sheer power of its writing. This was evident by the depth, length and quality of that after-play discussion - and the fact that every audience member remained behind to be part of it. A telling thread from that audience response was that *Foxholes of the Mind* will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression on every one who was there to see it.

I urge you to take the opportunity to go and experience *Foxholes of the Mind*. It's a production of power and eloquence - and it's probably the most potent anti-war play that I have seen.

Ever.

- *Colin Mockett*
