

Theatre battle fallout on stage

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COMPELLING:

A scene from the updated version of Foxholes.

The terror of war and its aftermath for soldiers shape the script of a confronting play on the way to Drysdale next month. Foxholes of the Mind draws on the accounts of former servicemen struggling to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from experiences in theatres of battle stretching from Vietnam to Iraq.

The play is the work of Bernard Clancy, a playwright, author and journalist with personal experiences of PTSD.

“I originally wrote Foxholes because I wanted to highlight the tragedy of PTSD, to try to stop the terrible waste and destruction of the human spirit that PTSD entails,” Clancy explained ahead of its local performances.

Foxholes premiered at Carlton’s famous La Mama theatre in 2010, drawing virtually full houses. The production had a “profound effect on veterans, wives and families”, its promoters said, while earning acclaim from critics and audiences alike.

This 2016 production has been rewritten to include the voice of younger veterans. “It’s a rough ride, however, as they fearfully face the demons of their past. And yet they still have a sense of humour, black though it may be at times,” Clancy said. He described the impact of PTSD on Australian soldiers as a “compelling and somewhat frightening story”.

After talking with younger veterans over the past few years I came to the shocking realisation that the PTSD problem is getting worse, much worse,” Clancy said “I needed to include the voice of the younger veteran, to highlight the cry for help from our young men and women who served in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.” Wolf Heidecker and his production company, Larrikin Ensemble Theatre, has returned to direct the updated version of Foxholes.

Most of the original cast who drew standing ovations at La Mama would also return, the promoters said.

The production has the support of Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, whose director praised Foxholes. There's a message of hope and strength that clearly comes through," Ann O'Kane said.

This is a key ingredient that will assist veterans and family members to have the courage to step forward to seek help. If the play is seen by more Australians, particularly health professionals, the raised awareness of the issues will be of immense benefit."

Foxholes of the Mind also has support from Victorian Veterans' Council, Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Servicemen and Women Association Victoria, City of Greater Geelong, the RSL and private philanthropists.

The show plays Drysdale's Potato Shed 7.30pm from 9 to 13 August, with a 3.30pm matinee on 14 August.

Tickets are available from City customer service centres or the Potato Shed.
