

HOLDING THE MAN

- *Holding the Man* is an Australian play adapted by Tommy Murphy from the book by Timothy Conigrave. The book was published posthumously in 1995.
- This production of *Holding the Man* opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday 13 March 2024.
- The production is directed by Eamon Flack, Belvoir's Artistic Director.
- *Holding the Man* runs for approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one interval.
- *Holding the Man* is set in Melbourne and Sydney, from a flashback to a moment in the late 1960s, then from the 1970s to 1995. The play follows the relationship between Timothy Conigrave and John Caleo from the time they first met at school, until John's death from AIDS in 1994.
- *Holding the Man* is set at a time when misinformation and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS were prevalent.
- The action of the play takes place in a variety of settings, including a high school, a family home, a change room, a night club, NIDA, a theatre, Tim and John's flat, a doctor's surgery, a hotel room, a hospital room.
- The set is designed by Stephen Curtis and represents a 1970s era living room. All locations are represented on this set. The set design include couches and armchairs on which audience members are seated during the show. At times, the actors interact with audience members seated on the stage.
- There are six actors in the production, four of whom play multiple roles. Different characters are represented with wigs and costume changes, often made on stage, as part of the action of the play. The production deliberately draws attention to the elements of theatre at work. At times, the character of Tim comments directly on their own actions in a scene.
- The production contains strong language and sexual references. Strong language is used as part of everyday, colloquial speech.
- Frequent strong language is used in a scene depicting 17-year-old schoolboys on a trip away after their final exams. One boy asks "What's the most sexually bizarre thing you've heard of" To which another boy replies 'Um. Farmer boys get the paddy calves to suck them off' and '...a Wesley guy cut the nut out of a porno poster and put mince meat behind it and shoved in a bar heater to keep it warm-'This conversation is in the context of the setting and the age of the characters.
- In this scene the boys (played by actors of all genders) have a competition, each in their own sleeping bag, to see who can cum first. The actors make actions and vocalizations to indicate the characters are masturbating inside their sleeping bags. There is a moment when excessive liquid squirts (representing ejaculation) from inside one of the sleeping bags onto the face of the actor inside it. The scene has a slightly heightened, humorous tone to it.
- *Holding the Man* contains frank discussions about sex, including anal sex, and sexual attraction. Conversations occur in the context of the late 1970s and early 80s, where young people had fewer sources of advice, information, and counsel than they do in 2024.
- The production contains two sex scenes between consenting men. The scenes are stylised, rather than wholly naturalistic. On both occasions the actors are partly, or fully clothed.
- The production contains words used to describe same-gender relationships which would not be used in 2024, including 'gays', 'poofers', 'homosexual'. The word 'trolling' is used differently. The production refers to saunas and trade. There is one reference to 'boy videos.'
- The production contains words and slurs which may upset audience members, including 'bum chums' and 'homeo and poofster-ette.' On occasion, the word 'homosexuals' is used in a derogatory manner, representing the prejudice experienced by Tim and John. A character says 'In [my parents'] country they used to stone people for being gay.'
- *Holding the Man* contains scenes in which parents are seen not accepting their children's sexuality.
- The production contains reference to open relationships and being unfaithful to a partner. Being unfaithful in a relationship is shown as being hurtful to the other person,

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- The production contains scenes set in night clubs. During one scene, set in a night club, two characters approach a couch in the front row of the onstage seating and ask two audience members to move over so that one actor can sit between them – the other actor kneels before the actor and mimes performing fellatio on this actor. When finished, the kneeling actor asks audience members seated on the couch ‘Does anybody have a tissue?’ Both actors are fully clothed.
- Characters on stage are, on occasion, seen smoking marijuana in the context of adults partying. Characters are seen drinking (fake) alcohol onstage. Characters refer to being drunk.
- There is onstage smoking and haze.
- *Holding the Man* contains details of AIDS-related illness and symptoms, such as hallucinations, night sweats, seizures, fevers, sores, pneumocystis pneumonia, and lymphoma. Medical jargon is used in the play such as cell count, suppressor cells, seroconversion, and T-cells. There is a reference to the drug haloperidol.
- The production refers to death, dying and grief. John’s final moments of life are represented on stage. The audience hears the character’s last breaths.
- Towards the beginning of the production, **there is a brief moment of onstage nudity**. The actor playing John Caleo is in a change room after football practice. The character is changing out of his football uniform and stands with his back partly to the audience while fully undressed. The actor then places a towel around the lower half of his body.
- The characters of John and Tim appear on stage wearing their Y front underwear.
- The play refers to well-known Sydney institutions – NIDA and the Griffin Theatre.
- Audience members are asked to turn phones off completely and refrain from eating in the theatre. Students need to know that the performance is live and that the actors see and hear them in the audience. We encourage laughter and natural reactions. Taking notes shouldn’t happen during performances.

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