

Lines

By Pamela Carter. Theatre Republic. Bakehouse Theatre. October 24-November 10th 2018

Theatre Republic is a company that has been created to provoke, to move and present fearless stories that are of our time and our complex world, and through the medium of courageous drama, to capture the essence and complexity of what it means to be human.

Lines, by multi-skilled English playwright, Pamela Carter, does all these things through the lens of war and its impact on young men, ready for battle with no battle to fight. Their hero is Mark Wahlberg and the mantra repeatedly threaded through the 75-minute performance is the repetition of “bang, bang, bang.” A glorious death for them is graphic, heroic, vivid and unattained, despite their fantasies of their personal courage lifting them from the status of soldier to film star-style army hero.

Lines ruthlessly exposes the underbelly of masculine identity. It explores its expectations and the very real challenges and questionable belief that men with disparate goals, and from diverse backgrounds, cultures and belief sets, when thrown together, will seamlessly develop into one accountable Australian Army platoon. Unsurprisingly, we find out that this idea is deeply flawed as each of the four characters holds onto their identities, motivations and fears, despite the precision, repetition and humiliations that their training affords them.



The performances of all four actors are excellent; compelling, consistent and believable. Matt Crook as Locke is strong, committed and gay. He is brittle and anxious at times, but is a passionate soldier, perhaps using the army to prove his “manliness”.

As Valentine, Rashidi Edward is god fearing, prays nightly and repeatedly reminds us that “the army is not for everyone”, whilst desperately trying to prove that it is for him.

Stuart Fong as Mackay is the character who gives the audience permission to laugh; often breaking deeply tense moments. His performance is energetic and his fear is palpable. His face is used, to great effect, as a window to his fears and feelings.

As with all groups of people, there are some who we do not like, almost from the start, and it is the role of Perk, beautifully portrayed by James Smith, that brings us the character who we do not trust, like or see as a team player. This is no easy task and Smith brings to this role a vulnerability that is, at times, heartbreaking. Captured realistically and graphically, Perk simply cannot, and does not want to fit in.

Whilst we never see the Corporal, voiced cleverly by Renato Musolino, he manages to command the stage. He belittles, demands, humiliates and plays favourites in such a way that both the audience and the actors actually believe he is there.

Notable is the choreography by Roz Hervey. The movement is precise, military and seamless, not only in the obvious drill scenes; it is also used to show the growing “oneness” of the group as the story unfolds. It is a critically important complementary factor in this production.

Chris Petridis designed and uses lighting, including some strobe, with powerful effect. The audience is taken into battle, through reality, and with subtle changes in light, into the minds and imaginations of the characters. Again, it is a critical, well used element in this story.

Director, Corey McMahon has not wasted a single opportunity in using every gesture, every glance, every subtle nuance or throw away line. The actors are rehearsed to a level of military precision to create a well-honed ensemble who sleep, march, sleep and make beds with crisp hospital corners, as one unit, powerfully mirroring the tale.

Lines is polished, riveting, challenging, entertaining and confronting, and in the Bakehouse Theatre, the audience is in the sparsely furnished barrack, within an arm's reach of the actors and the action, adding to the tension and sense of reality.

This is Theatre Republic's first production. Strongly supported by the State Theatre Company of SA, they have seized the opportunity to bring politically challenging and provoking theatre to Adelaide. They fundraised to mount this maiden production and have proven that they are a theatre force to be respected, encouraged and supported.

Do not miss this extraordinary production.

Jude Hines