

## **Blackrock Review**

by Belinda Seeney  
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***BLACKROCK*, Nick Enright's gritty exploration of masculinity, adolescence and sexual violence, was controversial when it was first staged in 1995 because it paralleled the real life rape and murder of a 14-year-old schoolgirl. It's now more relevant than ever.**



**A scene from La Boite's production of *Blackrock*. Picture: Dylan Evans**

This is an uncomfortable, challenging yet utterly riveting piece of theatre.

La Boite Theatre Company's artistic director Todd MacDonald has tweaked the work for a modern audience — smartphones and selfies were foreign concepts for teens in the mid-1990s — and staged it in the round at the Kelvin Grove theatre.

Eight final-year drama students from QUT are cast alongside three stage veterans — Christen O'Leary, Amy Ingram and Joss McWilliam — with the young actors injecting frenetic realism and authenticity into the work.

*Blackrock* follows central character Jared (Ryan Hodson), essentially a good kid led astray when his older friend and surrogate father-figure Ricko (a standout Karl Stuifzand) returns to town.

Throw in Toby (Tom Cossettini), a new-to-town teen from a wealthy family desperate to fit in, and the aggressive Scott (Thomas Wilson), add alcohol and girls to the mix and the result is explosive.

The fallout from a boozy beach party where a 15-year-old girl is gang-raped and murdered makes for compelling yet uneasy viewing as the themes of toxic masculinity, class division, sexism, family and mateship are played out on stage.

The girl's attack is implied rather than depicted — perhaps to make the work more accessible and less confronting for a teenage audience — yet the impact is felt as the play takes an abrupt turn into darker territory.

La Boite first staged *Blackrock* in 1997, the same year the movie starring Heath Ledger in his first film role was released, and I recall the impact it had on me then.

I was interested to see how the work held up two decades later and gauge what my own teenage son, almost the same age now as I was then, thought.

He, too, found the subject matter intense and while he admired the play and its performances he remarked it felt wrong to say he “enjoyed” the piece.

A key criticism among us both was the absence of any redeeming male characters, particularly despairing after 90 minutes of watching boys and men behaving appalling and having their actions excused and even defended.

However, that issue stems from Enright's source material, not the stage adaptation.

Mention must be made of set designer Anthony Spinaze's rotating wooden structure; a malleable centrepiece that morphed from beach boardwalk to surf club; cemetery to boxing gym and countless other forms.

*Blackrock* is thought-provoking, unsettling and still a pertinent and powerful piece of theatre.

Take your teenagers.