

# SCENESTR.

## From Darkness Review @ Brisbane Festival 2019

- Written by [Luisa Ryan](#)
- Tuesday, 17 September 2019 18:15

Published in [Arts News](#)

**'From Darkness' is a confronting, moving, and hilarious play about culture, loss, and the world beyond.**

'From Darkness' tells the story of an Indigenous family living with grief. One young adult son, Vinnie, has committed suicide, leaving behind a twin, a younger sister, his parents and Nan. The family dynamics one year after his death remain strained, and under the surface, really quite vicious. As an anniversary dinner is being prepared, emotions boil to the surface, and confrontations and admissions of guilt fly between family members.

This is a dark, dark play. While there are some very funny one-liners, and Nanna Lou in general is quite the character in every sense of the word, audiences should be prepared for a tough time. The story is worth it. The relationships between the three female family members, spanning three generations, are particularly difficult. Nanna Lou, who is the husband's mother, clearly feels that blood runs deeper than water when it comes to her daughter-in-law, and the mother's drinking and swearing, while understandable, is hard to watch when directed at her teenage daughter.

The men are relatively walled off, Preston, the remaining twin, literally so as he barricades himself in his bedroom, and his father more figuratively so. Each actor gives a solid performance, although Roxanne McDonald as potty-mouthed Nanna Lou is magnetic, despite a couple of fluffed lines. Benjin Maza as Preston was a stand-out, however, embodying the space between life and the beyond (this was particularly impressive, as he spent much of the performance lying in bed).

The storytelling using digital technology was absolutely beautiful, and gave form to some of the Indigenous culture running through the play. This is one aspect that makes this play so important, not only does it shine a light on grief, a universal theme, it was unapologetically Indigenous. Language was used that, as a white Australian, I have not heard before, but it wasn't explained or translated. Culture and belief were an integral part of the story, but again, there was no little booklet distributed to give the audience a cultural primer. Instead, it exposed the continuing, and seemingly endless, lack of knowledge of mainstream Australia when it comes to the world's oldest continuous culture, and one we should be proud to call part of our own. The audience had to pay attention, had to listen to a story the way the storytellers wanted to tell it. That's one reason the play was so powerful.

After the opening night performance, 'From Darkness' playwright, Steven Oliver, gave an address. In it, he thanked La Boite for supporting him to tell his story the way he wanted to tell it; without softening edges, without apology. The result is an unqualified success.