

# Play's powerful words

**T**ALKING to Tom Holloway, the words "fantastic", "amazing" and "incredible" come up frequently. This 29-year-old Tasmanian playwright, now based in Melbourne, is on an amazing career path, all right.

But mostly he applies such words to the actors, directors and theatre companies he works with — and theatre's ability to deal with the big issues.

Holloway's first major work, *Beyond the Neck*, about the after-effects of the Port Arthur massacre, has just been nominated for an Awgie — an Australian Writers' Guild Award.

His second major work, *Don't Say the Words*, has become the Tasmanian Theatre Company's second production, in co-production with Sydney's Griffin Theatre.

A powerful three-hander about a man coming back from an overseas war to confront his wife and her lover, it is directed by Perth wunderkind Matthew Lutton and stars mainland actors Jack Finsterer, Anna Lise Phillips and Brett Stiller.

The play last night came to the end of a three-week Sydney season which attracted strong critical interest. "Holloway perfectly captures the rhythmic musicality of human utterance, weaving speech, stutter, song and even burping into a rich aural tapestry," was Matthew Clayfield's comment in *The Australian*.

Holloway was in Sydney throughout the rehearsals and public previews.

"It's been a bit of a dream," he says. "The reviews have been positive and also the criticisms have been accurate."

"The actors were amazing — I watched the play eight or nine times and could see different things every time. It was a step up, seeing them respond to my work like that. It was a chance to see some of the best actors performing in such an intimate space."

Another revelation was designer Adam Gardnir's set — a gleaming black-tiled bathroom.

"The script has very few stage directions in it, they are really just actions. The play is not set in



**TENSE:** Jack Finsterer and Anna Lise Phillips in Tom Holloway's *Don't Say the Words*.



**applaud**  
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any location. The director and design team created so much more than my script," he says.

The staging at Hobart's Backspace will be the same as used at the Stables Theatre in Sydney.

With a full bath and water flooding across the stage at particular moments, don't wear your satin stilettos if you have front-row tickets.

Both theatres seat 120 and bring the audience very close to the action.

"I'm very interested in the experience theatre can create for audiences," Holloway says.

"Being in the same room as the actors has much more than a cerebral effect."

His quest for an emotional response chimes with the classical Greek concept of catharsis — a purging of emotions by experiencing fearful events on stage.

Holloway based *Don't Say the Words* on *Agamemnon*, part of the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, about the family repercussions of a king going off to fight in the Trojan War. However, he says the



**STRONG STATEMENT:** Tasmanian playwright Tom Holloway believes theatre is a good place to deal with big issues.

play is not heavily indebted to Greek tragedy.

"The dialogue has a rhythm to it, as in the original, but mainly what I took from it was the plot and motivation," he says. "The characters are valuable and human, they make human mistakes."

"There's a phrase used about the *Oresteia* — hate in love. What happens when violence appears in our most intimate relationships?"

"For me, Agamemnon and (wife) Clytemnestra once had a deep sense of love but it's got lost in the things they've done over the years."

"Over the last few weeks, the news has had all these people doing violent things to families like the axe murders in northern New South Wales and the man who killed his kids in Bega."

"Research show it's quite often closely linked to love: the actions are wrong but the instincts quite familiar," he says.

"*Beyond the Neck* was very similar — looking at people coming to terms with acts of sudden violence and tragedy. There's something in me that wants to try to communicate things we find it difficult to talk about. Theatre is a great place to come and share some of those hard stories."

● ***Don't Say the Words* opens at the Backspace on Thursday and runs until August 28.**



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