

EXTRACT

TRAILER

VANESSA

BATES



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enquiries@currency.com.au

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INTRODUCTION

Being isolated in a perceived dead-end town is a feeling relatable to many teenagers. I experienced it myself, as a young girl growing up in the Hunter Region of NSW. I struggled with the conflict of feeling compelled to escape yet bound to stay, tempted by the comforts of familiar territory, home and family. It was only after I moved away that I gained perspective and could see that the place in which I grew up really wasn't that bad, and that many things I had earlier deemed insignificant had become unique and even special. I began to value my childhood experiences, sheltered from the bright lights and busy pace of the city. The disaffection transformed to affection. It is the complexity of relationship to place, negotiated during a journey of self-discovery, that lies at the heart of *Trailer*.

Tantrum Youth Arts commissioned Vanessa Bates to write a play giving voice to young people and regional stories in Wyong, NSW. With the support of Wyong Shire Council and Arts NSW, Tantrum facilitated workshops with young people living on the NSW Central Coast, with Bates and local theatre director Anna Kerrigan. What they uncovered in these workshops were a variety of subjects: isolation; being caught between two worlds; home vs. unfamiliar territories; fractured and single-parent families; the railway; unemployment; social media; rumours and fame; identity and loss. All of these informed the creation of *Trailer*.

Bates paints the Central Coast and Wyong as unprogressive and conservative; as in-between places, destinations on a train line connecting two cities: Sydney and Newcastle. This allows the audience to imagine that growing up with two mums may not have been an easy experience for Jed in his youth. The bluntness with which a fellow passenger dismisses *Dallas Buyers Club* through casual homophobia illuminates the idea that Jed is living in a place that has the potential to stymie his growth.

PASSENGER: I didn't like that one actually. Too long. Also.
Too gay. (p.6)

The theme of isolation is introduced early in the play. The play opens on the train with each cast member wearing earphones, tuned into a device, not making contact or speaking out loud. The inherent irony in this setting is that as we view a group of people sharing a communal experience, it quickly dawns on the audience that each person exists in complete isolation from one another. We see disparate worlds coexist, as we hear snippets of podcasts and music revealing the differing tastes of the commuters. Following this arresting movement and sound sequence it becomes evident that nobody wants to disrupt this status quo, even when there is perceived danger threatening a fellow commuter. The real tension driving this scene, however, is in the friction between Jed's inner yearning to intervene and his frozen (passive) physical state.

JED: And I think: I should have got up.
I should have helped them.
I should have saved them. (p.3, Scene One)

The opening's movement and soundscape sequence is repeated two times later throughout the play. This repetition serves to both depict the unwaveringly monotonous nature of the commute and to allow us to vicariously experience Jed's world.

Bates uses the train as a powerful metaphor. The train becomes life itself, a force that moves forward like time: you can sit back and observe or you can take charge, take action. For much of the play we see Jed as a passenger, both literally on the train and metaphorically in his own life. As he rides the train, physically transported from one place to another, it becomes increasingly clear that this is not due to his agency, but rather Jed has become the eponymous trailer, forever being pulled along, never at the wheel. In many instances we see both Jed and Keera ride the trains simply for fun, or use them as an escape, a place to sit, think, observe, or to run away. For Jed there is safety in the isolation of the quiet carriage and Bates uses syncopated rhythms in the dialogue to create the somnambulistic ambience in which Jed finds comfort.

Like Jed, other patrons largely keep to themselves on the train, earphones in, not talking, but Keera pulls Jed from his insular world by proclaiming the sight of him as an exciting celebrity spotting moment.

KEERA: [*loudly*] Your dad's a movie star!

JED: Don't—

KEERA: You're a little bit famous! (p.4)

We find out a rumour exists in Wyong that Jed is the lovechild of a famous Hollywood actor. This is not a trivial detail in Jed's life; in many ways, it has become forged with his very identity. Keera's assertion brings the carriage to life in a comical guessing game about who Jed's father is, elevating him from his perceived mundane existence in the process.

We come to understand that this rumour has been fundamental to Jed's sense of self-worth. Being associated with fame has made him feel special. It is evident that Jed didn't necessarily invest in the truth of this rumour, but nevertheless it has remained a crucial facet of his being. The confirmation of his suspicions about the veracity of this rumour in the latter half of the play therefore has an abruptly shattering effect, and marks a turning point in Jed's life.

JED: But having someone famous for a dad, even if I didn't actually have him ...

...

I had the spark. Because of him. And now, it's gone...
and I'm falling.

...

I'm just ordinary, Keera. I'm just like anyone else, made up from an ordinary egg and a very ordinary sperm.
I'm sorry.

Beat.

I'm not playing anymore. (pp.26,34)

The fantasy is over and in this powerful declarative statement, we understand that it is time for Jed to confront the truth about his existence. The idealised intangible presence of his father dissolves and Jed begins to reckon with the corporeal devastation being experienced by Caryl, his birth mum, who has actually played a tangible role in his life. Towards the end of the play Frank helps Jed see that his 'spark' has nothing to do with his absent father, but that it comes from the strength and courage within.

FRANK: I'm not saying she'll get better, nothing like that.
Just that, I can tell, you'll get through this. You got a
spark in you. (p.37)

Jed finally takes action and visits his mother in hospital. He once again boards the train, but where there was previously isolation, there is now connection to a purpose; where there was somnambulance, Jed is now fiercely awake.

He has reached legal adulthood, but Jed will not achieve true maturation until he can fully define and understand himself. Jed's two mums Caryl and Jane had protected him by not telling him the truth: both in regards to Jed's father, and about the severity of Caryl's illness. Later we find out this was not a selfless act, but rather an act of self-preservation, as Jane is struggling to cope with the news. Jed describes the hole in his gut in language that evokes a carcinogenic tumour, his emotional torment paralleling Caryl's physical suffering.

JED: Sometimes it feels like I've got this hole here in my
gut, getting bigger and bigger every day. (p.37)

Bates uses the symbol of the sinkhole to give this impending loss an onstage presence. This is cleverly done, as Caryl's character never appears onstage. The physical presence of the sinkhole, in conjunction with Keera's fascination with it, is a reminder of just how fast and unexpectedly loss can occur. The ground can fall out from under us in a few moments.

KEERA: You see the second brother, crying, and you wonder
if he'll ever survive that grief. It's like a gap, a part of
him missing, left by someone who just disappears. (p.29)

Trailer explores vital issues of identity, family, self-discovery and loss. The story manages to be both intimate and universal in its appeal, as we follow a young man who realises what he needs to do in order to truly live, instead of simply existing. As many teenagers feel dissatisfaction with the place in which they grew up, they too feel that their own stories are uninteresting and not worthy of being shared, but this commission saw the immense value of the struggles and experiences of young people

living in regional areas. Bates' mastery lies in uncovering the special things within people, especially when these people don't yet see it themselves.

*Lucy Shepherd
Newcastle, 2018*

Lucy Shepherd is a theatre maker, performer, director and arts educator. She is the Artistic Director of Tantrum Youth Arts, Newcastle, and a co-founder of contemporary performance collective, Paper Cut.

Trailer was first produced by Tantrum Youth Arts at The Art House, Wyong, NSW, on 12 May 2016, with the following cast:

KEERA	Tallulah Cobbin
JANE	Angie Diaz
FRANK / KEERA'S FATHER	Christopher Saunders
JED	Jackson Vaughan

All minor roles, including train passengers, were shared between the actors.

Director, Anna Kerrigan
Designer, Joshua Maxwell
Design Mentor, Tobhiyah Stone Feller
Lighting Designer, Lyndon Buckley
Sound Designer, Jess Blackburn
Producer, Tamara Gazzard

The original production of *Trailer* was supported by Arts NSW, Wyong Shire Council and The Art House; and developed with the support of Playwriting Australia in the National Script Workshop 2015.

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CHARACTERS

JED, 19. Grew up and went to school in Wyong on the Central Coast. All of his school friends have left and gone to jobs or uni in Sydney or Newcastle.

KEERA, mid teens. Sister of a girl who was in Jed's year at school.

JANE, 40s. Long-term partner of Caryl, Jed's mother.

FRANK, 40s. Works at the council. He is one of those people who seems abrupt on the outside but has a heart of gold.

PASSENGERS

RAILWAY ANNOUNCER

GUY ON TRAIN

KEERA'S FATHER

POLICE OFFICER

PISSED-OFF BLOKE

All the actors at times play another character, usually a passenger on the train. They may flip from one character to another within a line or two.

SETTING

Wyong, a town on the Central Coast of New South Wales. The train line through Wyong goes south to Sydney or north to Newcastle.

NOTE

Scenes One, Seven, Thirteen and Sixteen can be thought of as movement pieces/breathing spaces. These are on a carriage on a train. The last turns into a more naturalistic scene when Jane and Jed appear.

The train rhythm should put emphasis on the second syllable:

Ch *ch*, ch *ch*

ch *ch*, ch *ch* ...

SCENE ONE

Sound of a train.

PASSENGERS *move onto the train space.*

Soundtrack starts.

Nobody makes contact. Nobody speaks out loud.

Everyone is wearing or looking at a device.

Everyone wears earphones.

Some people text.

Some people listen to music or are mid-conversation. Soundtrack is made of snippets of music, grunge or classical, podcasts or a recorded conversation.

This movement piece seamlessly moves into next scene.

Soundtrack fades into ...

Sound of the train.

SCENE TWO

Sound of the train continues.

RAILWAY ANNOUNCER: A reminder that there are three quiet carriages on this train. They are the first, last and central carriages. Passengers are asked to refrain from loud conversations, playing music or using your mobile phones in these carriages.

JED is on the train with other PASSENGERS.

JED: I see this guy, he's wearing a cap ... one of those trucker caps, and sunglasses. Sort of asleep ...

ACTOR 4: Starts up, soon after we leave the station, saying something under his breath.

JED: First I can't even hear him, but soon I can just make out.

ACTOR 2: Noises.

Words.

Rhythmic.

Goes with the sound of the train.

ACTOR 3: Ch *ch*, ch *ch*
ch *ch*, ch *ch* ...

JED: But it's

GUY: Fuck *fuck*, fuck *fuck*
Fuck *fuck*, fuck *fuck* ...

ACTOR 4: And—

JED: We're in the top of the quiet carriage, that's my preferred carriage:
the quiet carriage

ACTOR 3: the quiet carriage, the one at the front, he's got his back to the
engine,

JED: I'm a few seats back with my head down but watching, and I realise
I can hear other voices,

ACTOR 2: further down, must be in the front bit of the carriage

JED: I can hear other voices, these two women. I think one's younger and
one's older because of the way they talk to each other,

ACTOR 2: the younger one's really polite

ACTOR 3: and the older one's a bit of a know-it-all

ACTORS 2 & 3: [*together*] and they both talk *really* loudly.

JED: And I realise they haven't stopped talking since we left the station ...

ACTOR 3: Sort of breathe out, exhalation,

ACTOR 2: avalanche of words ...

OLDER WOMAN PASSENGER: My mother, your mother,

YOUNGER WOMAN PASSENGER: my family, your family,

OLDER WOMAN PASSENGER: his wedding, her wedding,

YOUNGER WOMAN PASSENGER: my father, your son.

JED: But now the guy in the cap, he's talking too, under the rhythm of
the train

GUY: Fuck *fuck*, fuck *fuck*
Fuck *fuck*, fuck *FUCK!*

JED: He's getting angrier, and his voice is getting louder and

ACTOR 4: suddenly he sort of lurches up out of his seat and he's heading
down the stairs towards the women

JED: and I think: I should get help

ACTOR 3: help them, get up

ACTOR 2: do something!

JED: Ch *ch*, ch *ch*
ch *ch*, ch *ch* ...

ACTOR 4: They obviously can't see him or can't hear him and their voices are getting louder

JED: ch *ch*, ch *ch*!
ch *ch*, ch *ch*! ...

ACTOR 3: *You should*

ACTOR 2: *get out*

ACTOR 3: *have fun*

ACTOR 2: *you're young!*

GUY: *Fuck fuck, fuck fuck*
fuck fuck, fuck fuck!

JED: And then. That second where voices overlap, he must be right next to them,

ACTOR 4: he must be standing right over them,

JED: and I hear him yell:

GUY: It's really fucking noisy in here for a so-called quiet carriage!

Slight pause.

JED: And I think: I should have got up.

I should have helped them.

I should have saved them.

And then

I hear them say ...

Slight pause.

ACTOR 2: Shhhhhhhhhhh.

JED: Like you say to a kid.

ACTOR 3: Shhhhhh.

ACTORS 2, 3 & 4: [*together*] Shhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Slight pause.

JED: I think he might attack them. Or knife them. Or something.

Beat.

But he doesn't.

Pause.

RAILWAY ANNOUNCER: Next stop is Tuggerah. Tuggerah next stop.

JED: He gets out at the next stop.

ACTOR 4: Still muttering. Still swearing under his breath.

ACTOR 2: Watch him walk along the platform. The train picks up speed
 JED: and then ... he's gone.

Pause.

JED is still watching out the window as KEERA, in school uniform, startles him.

KEERA: Hey! It's you!

JED: What ...?

KEERA: I know you.

JED: No you don't.

PASSENGER 3: Shhhh.

KEERA: I do. You were in my sister's year.

PASSENGER 4: Excuse me. This is a quiet carriage.

JED: Sorry. Sorry about that. [*To KEERA*] This is a quiet carriage.

KEERA: [*loudly*] Your dad's a movie star!

JED: Don't—

KEERA: You're a little bit famous!

Other PASSENGERS are looking. JED feels self-conscious.

JED: Stop that.

KEERA: He lives in Hollywood. He won an Academy Award! [*To the train*] He won an Oscar!

JED: Okay, stop it, alright.

KEERA: What was that movie he won the Oscar for?

Silence. JED is torn. PASSENGERS are fascinated.

Failure To Launch?

JED: [*horrified*] No.

KEERA: *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days? The Wedding Planner?*

JED: No. Obviously.

Beat.

Those are ... rom-coms.

PASSENGER 4: What about ... oh, what's it called?

PASSENGER 3: *Magic Mike?*

PASSENGER 4: No ... um ... he was really good ... what was it?... It'll come ...

PASSENGER 3: *Wolf of Wall Street?*

PASSENGER 4: Come off it, he only had five scenes ... No ... it was sort of ... science fiction.

JED: *Interstellar*.

PASSENGER 4: *Interstellar*! That's it. [To JED] He was very good in that.

KEERA: [to JED] Was *that* what he won the Oscar for?

JED: No.

He looks around, the carriage is waiting to hear.

Fine.

Slight pause.

Dallas Buyers Club.

PASSENGERS & KEERA: Yes! Of course! Knew it!

KEERA: He played the role of cowboy Ron Woodroof. The film earned wide critical acclaim and he won many acting awards, including the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor—Drama, and ... the Academy Award for Best Actor in 2014!

PASSENGERS *applaud*.

PASSENGER 3: [to JED] So, you're saying ... what ... he's your father?

KEERA: Yes! He's a little bit famous, I said that. Didn't I, Jed? [To PASSENGERS] Look at his face.

PASSENGERS *look at JED. Can't really see the resemblance.*

JED: People say I look like my mum.

PASSENGER 4: Movie star on the Coast. I remember that. Years ago.

KEERA: He was an exchange student. Here for a year. Met a local girl. Went back to America, became a big movie star.

PASSENGER 3: [to JED] Must be nice for you. Been over to visit much?

JED: No.

KEERA: How great would it have been if you'd gone to the Oscars with him? Wouldn't that have been great?

Everyone looks at JED. Excruciating.

RAILWAY ANNOUNCER: Next stop is Wyong. Wyong next stop.

JED: That's me.

KEERA: Me too. Wait up!

Beat. They're gone.

PASSENGER 3: *Dallas Buyers Club.*

PASSENGER 4: I didn't like that one actually. Too long. Also. Too gay.

Sound of a train rattling past.

SCENE THREE

Caryl, Jane and Jed's house.

JED *putting on his work clothes.*

He watches as JANE rushes past with a suitcase.

She rushes back. Flustered.

She rushes back the other way with a violin case and other items. She stops. Sniffs.

JANE: Are you wearing deodorant?

JED: Yes.

JANE: [*unconvinced*] Mmm.

She rushes past. JED takes the opportunity to quickly spray on some deodorant.

JANE comes back. She's still carrying the violin case.

He gives her a look.

She wanted the violin. I said there's no point, they won't let you play in the hospital. FYI. You look great.

JED: LOL. Thanks. ... Are you okay?

JANE: Yes ... It's just. Seeing you in a tie. You look like ... like someone with a proper job.

JED: That's because I am ... someone with a proper job.

JANE: And you look so ...

Almost teary. JED is embarrassed. She wants to take a photo on her phone.

JED: Bloody hell, Jane, don't ...

JANE: It's for Caryl.

She takes a pic.

One more.

Another.

Reminds me of your first day at school. I cried then too. Remember? Actually, Mum and I were both crying.

JED: Haven't you got a train to catch?

JANE: It's the eight thirty-three, I've got plenty of time. Sort of. I wish you were coming with me, alright? There, I've said it.

JED: You want me to miss my first day? First impressions count. You told me that.

JANE: I know, I know ... To tell the truth, I thought tomorrow was your first day.

JED: No. Today. I mean, if you think I should come with you ... But she said it was just tests. She said I shouldn't be worried.

Slight pause.

So is it? Just tests?

JANE: It is. Just tests. And she's right—you shouldn't be worried.

JED: And she'll be back soon anyway? Tomorrow? Next day?

JANE: Probably. I mean yes, you're right.

JED: So. I should go to work.

JANE: Yes. Caryl wants you to go to work. I want you to go to work. This is a good job, it could lead to ... other good jobs. We all know how hard it is around here. Most of your friends had to go.

JED: All my friends.

JANE: Yes. And that's why ... your two mums want you to go to work.

Beat.

And wear deodorant.

JED: Jane!

JANE: I know I know. Let me help fix your tie.

As she does.

JED: They'll give me all the shit jobs, won't they? 'Cause I'm new.

JANE: That's what newbies get to do.

JED: Play those lame jokes. Say things like ... 'Go and ask for a left-handed spanner' or 'Go and ask for a long stand'.

JANE: Yeah. [*Laughing*] My dad used to do that too. On the old trains, there was this big wheel at the front which was actually the brake. They used to tell newbies to hold onto that wheel so they could steer the train. [*Laughing*] Hold onto that wheel.

JED *isn't laughing*. JANE *tries to explain*.

You can't steer a train. The tracks do.

She laughs. JED *doesn't*.

Okay, I better go. Good luck on your first day. First impressions. Important. Love you.

She pecks him on the cheek. Goes to leave, stops a moment.

I'll tell her ... you'll see her soon?

JED: Sure. Tell her to hurry up and come home.

JANE *nods and leaves. Violin case left on the table.*

SCENE FOUR

Office. JED stands waiting as FRANK looks at his paperwork.

FRANK: Yep.

Pause.

Yep.

Pause.

Yep.

Silence.

[*Finally*] Not bad.

JED: Sorry, what?

FRANK: Your exam results. Not bad.

JED: Thanks.

FRANK: Not good though, were they?

JED *shrugs*.

No, hang on, my mistake. Says here you did well in 'Art'.

More waiting. FRANK is making little notes.

Jed.

JED: Yes?

FRANK: With a J.

JED: That's right.

FRANK: Jed. Is that short for something? Jeremy? Jebediah?

JED: Just ... Jed.

Pause.

FRANK: Just ... Jed.

He makes a little note.

So you wanted to start a bit early? Twenty-four hours early. Don't want to start on the start date we sent you: tomorrow. You want to start today. Any reason for that? Dental appointment? Meant to have a tooth pulled, were you?

Slight pause. JED searches for a reason.

JED: No reason. I'm just ... keen. First impressions. All that.

FRANK: Keen. Keen as mustard.

JED: Yeah. Is that wrong?

FRANK: No. I like a kid with a bit of oomph, has a bit of ... what do you call it ...?

JED: Initiative?

FRANK: I call it really bloody annoying. You're meant to be doing training on the job. That starts tomorrow. But you don't want to start tomorrow. You want to start today. So now, you have to do something different. Something special.

Beat.

Alright, got something special here for you to check out.

JED: Great.

FRANK: Yep. This. [*Indicating a piece of paper*] It might be bull. Probably is bull. But we have to check these things out, don't we, Jeremy?

JED: Jed.

FRANK: Yep. People ring up about every damn thing. Up to us to show some interest, give some reassurance. 'Got a possum in my roof.' 'Got a bunyip in the creek.' This one says they've got a sinkhole in their yard.

JED: [*slightly alarmed*] A sinkhole? Are you sure that's a job you want me to do? This is my first day.

FRANK: Pfft. S'not a sinkhole. Mine subsidence possibly. Or more likely old sewer pipes, leaking underground. If it's in the road ... pothole, not sinkhole.

JED: [*still alarmed*] Mine subsidence? How am I meant to ...?