



A *Playlab Indie* Publication

EXTRACT



# THE BOYS OF ST CRISPIAN

by Shane Pike

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## Introduction

*The Boys of St Crispian* is the first in a trilogy based on several years of research and investigation into young Australian male identity. The work is inspired by a script first presented at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts as part of my PhD in Performing Arts (a special mention to those first performers/collaborators, Barnaby Pollock, Haydon Wilson, Matthew Birmingham and Declan Burgess). This play, however, is very different to that original script and those seminal ideas, and is the culmination of an intensive development period in South America with the Brazilian theatre company Taanteatro, where those initial inspirations were taken and transformed through the evolutionary magic of Theatre of Tensions — a method of theatre making invented by Taanteatro. Since then, this story has also received development and support from the Gold Coast Arts Centre, Playlab, the formidable dramaturg Kathryn Kelly, writer/performer Rob Pensalfini, composer and actor Silvan Rus, and award-winning director Zoë Tuffin, to become the work that is presented to you now.

At the time of writing, the second work *Nineteen* is in pre-production with a season scheduled at the Brisbane Powerhouse later in the year, and the third and final instalment, *Egbert*, is in one of many drafts to come. The theme of identity formation, however, is the undeniable thread binding these works together. Born from concern of the dangerous behaviours often exhibited by young men as they attempt to replicate images of themselves drawn in the eyes of others; these works strive to articulate and highlight some of the issues faced by young males in attempting to define themselves in a world that often seems to bash against their desires and needs, ultimately shaping them into images of something they are not and were never meant to be.

Shane Pike

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks must go to Ian Lawson of Playlab, for his support in not only this work but of playwrights and developing Australian stories generally. Also a word of thanks to Associate Professor Doctor Rob Pensalfini of QSE for his contributions to the development of this play. And to Silvan Rus for his energy and suggestions working on the final drafts of the script, and for the original musical score he created for the first production. And, of course, to the original director, Zoë Tuffin, for making these words, and me, seem even better than I intended them.

## Foreward

The men in this play — George, Adam, Noah and Josh — are not real, but their stories are real in the Australian landscape. Lives wrecked by abuse, isolation, suicide, violence, ideals of manhood and manliness, and ultimately impacted by silence. In contemporary Australia data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)<sup>1</sup> show that suicide is approximately three times higher in males than females, which is consistent across every state and territory of Australia, and also statistics reported in other Western countries. The ratio of male to female suicides rose from 2:1 in the 1960s to over 4:1 in the 1990s. Since the year 2000, the ratio of male to female suicides has been approximately 3:1. To put this into a tangible context the recent article in *The Huffington Post*<sup>2</sup> about Australia's suicide crisis took this ABS data and put it in very stark words:

Australia's suicide rate is the highest it has been for at least ten years. In 2015, 3,027 people ended their own lives in Australia. That's 12.6 people in every 100,000.

That's more than eight people every single day.

One person every three hours.

Then add into the mix the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that is currently being heard and the public research report<sup>3</sup> that found there are limited programs and services to help prevent child sexual abuse and those that do exist are not well coordinated. It is in this powder-keg of abuse, suicide and the culture of 'don't ask, don't tell' that we find ourselves as a voyeur on the lives of four young men as told through the words of George, with the other three characters of Adam, Noah and Josh represented as avatars through glasses of beer on the bar and in text and unanswered phone messages.

While this play does not make direct links between child sexual abuse and suicide, research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies<sup>4</sup> has established a strong, albeit complex relationship between child sexual abuse and adverse mental health consequences for many victims. At the most serious extreme of mental health problems, the findings related to suicide ideation, suicide attempts and actual suicides are of particular concern. The distancing and silencing, both real and fictionalized, as presented in this play, is part of the problem associated with suicide and child sexual abuse. And even as the play ends one character

1 — See more at: <http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media/reporting-suicide/facts-and-stats#sthash.8JbVhO5B.dpuf>

2 — <http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/09/27/australias-suicide-crisis-has-peaked-to-a-terrifying-new-height/>

3 — <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2017-03/research-finds-lack-of-coordination-in-child-sexua>

4 — <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/long-term-effects-child-sexual-abuse/impact-child-sexual-abuse-mental-health>

urges another to say nothing of the abuse and violent events but just to leave, and finally to become anonymous. And so the cycle is allowed to continue. We, the audience, are left wondering who is the abuser and who is the abused, who is the perpetrator and who is impacted by the event or silence, and in the slippery boundary that polarizes both positions we might begin to understand that in the context of this play these characters might be one and the same. That which goes unsaid, is left to be unchallenged. It is in this space theatre finds itself. To be a site for vocalizing and magnifying issues because we as theatre-makers can truncate time and experience, and in doing so can amplify both that which is good and that which is not so good.

The questions raised in Shane Pike's excellent writing do not sit comfortably. But theatre should not be about comfort. It should be a place to ask tricky questions, to ride the boundaries of binary opposites and to perhaps begin a process of healing and reconciliation.

Sandra Gattenhof  
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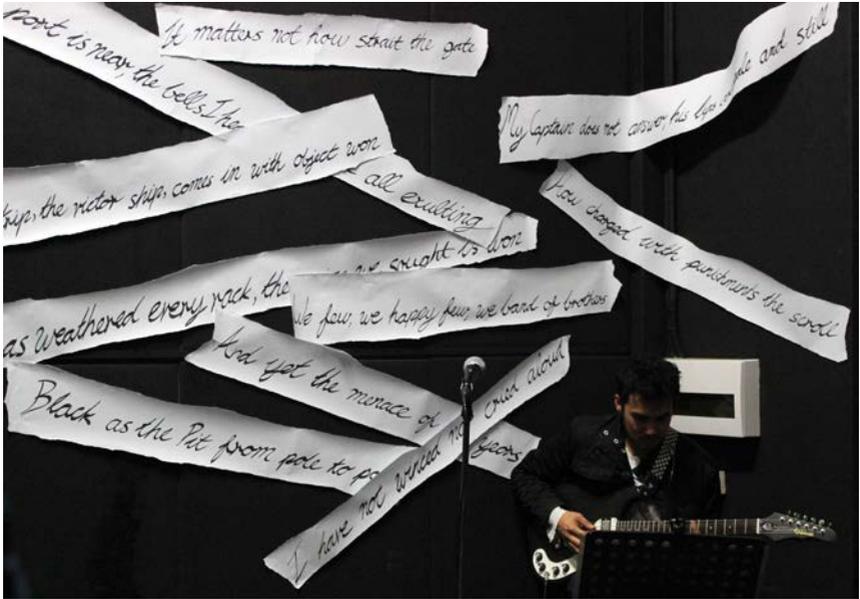
26 March 2017

## First Production Details

*The Boys of St Crispian* was first produced under the title *Bloke* by Wax Lyrical Productions for the Anywhere Theatre Festival at the Blackwall Artist Space, West End, on 9 May 2014, with the following creatives:

GEORGE	Shane Pike
COMPOSER/LIVE MUSIC PERFORMER	Silvan Rus
DIRECTOR	Zoë Tuffin
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Natalie Lazaroo
DESIGNER	Zoë Tuffin
STAGE MANAGER	Laura McKenna

## Production Photos



Silvan Rus. 2014. Blackwall Artist Space, West End. Photographer: Bonnie Murcia Baguley



Shane Pike. 2014. Blackwall Artist Space, West End. Photographer: Bonnie Murcia Baguley



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