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Australian theatre

This House is Mine review – a good, hard look at mental illness and homelessness



Eternity Playhouse, Sydney

Milk Crate's latest brutal but beautiful show is about more than homelessness, exploring the complex links between domestic and mental instability





📷 Matthias Nudl of Milk Crate theatre in This House is Mine. Photograph: Milk Crate theatre company.

Carla Rocavert

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Sleeping rough, bed hopping or dealing with a sense of permanent instability in shelters

or severely overcrowded dwellings is something the majority of Australians will never experience.

But [the 105,237 people](#) who are homeless in Australia right now are not so lucky. Worse still, 42% of that number are under 25, and homelessness has risen 20% in New South Wales and Victoria since 2006, and 30% in Tasmania.

Doubtless these statistics are all too believable for the audience of a community performance of This House is Mine at the Eternity Playhouse in Sydney. “I’m homeless myself,” said one man as he sat down to fill in his post-show evaluation form.

Milk Crate [Theatre](#) provides a special kind of shelter. Working with the personal experiences of its ensemble (who have all experienced homelessness or marginalisation), it tells real stories: brutal and beautiful by turn. And this time, it was the theme of mental illness that emerged out of their conversations.

Effort radiates from all sides as Chris Barwick, Fabiola Meza, Veronica Flynn, John McDonnell, Matthias Nudl, Contessa Treffone and Rach Williams exchange the comedy, poetry and drama of Maree Freeman’s script with a visceral soundscape and a secondary video cast.

Director Paige Rattray of Sydney Theatre Company manages a multi-layered production, complemented by the colours, shapes and moods of Sarah Emery’s video design.

Blinking throughout the action, the videoed troupe bravely share insights into their darkest psychoses, the loss of dignity in mental illness, the relief in diagnosis and their gratitude towards people who cared. “I am a fighter”, “I am a butterfly”, “I am who I am”, “I am still here”, they remark as hope flickers on the small screen off stage. Especially reverent is Milk Crate’s “oldest” collaborator, one of many who have been able to change their lives as part of the company over the past 15 years.

● [This House is Mine](#) is at the Eternity Playhouse, Darlington, until 22 March. A Q&A session, “Breaking the cycle: why does homelessness still exist?” will follow the final performance

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