

Symphonie of the Bicycle
by Hew Parham

Recommended for ages 15+ / Year 10 - 12

The production runs for approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes with no interval.

Symphonie of the Bicycle is a play that follows two different characters in two different settings: the first being modern-day Adelaide and the second being Europe (mostly Italy and France) in the 1930's-40's. In modern-day Adelaide, Hew is a passionate wannabe cyclist stuck in a malaise caused by a cycle of dead-end jobs and missed opportunities; he has long harboured a pathological envy of his more successful high school friend, now professional cyclist, Jake. In 1930-40's Europe, the great Gino Bartali (1914 - 2000) became winner of the Tour de France in 1938 and 1948, and risked his life to save Jewish lives in Northern Italy by secretly transporting documents in his bicycle; the play goes into other significant moments of his life. These two characters stories combine in *Symphonie of the Bicycle* to create an absurdly hysterical yet ultimately moving portrait of the quest for glory and heroism. The play explores themes of obsession, envy and ambition, winning and losing, and finding the inner grit to dominate the mountain stages of life.

Scripted dialogue contains description, mention, reference to or staging of the following:

Coarse Language:

There is frequent use of the word 'fuck', 'ass', 'bullshit' and 'shit'.

Characters speak to each other using derogatory terms e.g. 'you fat fuck', 'fucking weasel', 'pansy boy', 'tool shed', 'fucking wuss', 'old fuck'.

Sexual Content:

There are references to male characters having "an impressive looking package".

There is an allusion to the drugging and sexual abuse of a young boy by a priest: "... next thing Father Barry invites you into the office, offers you a juicy looking pastry, you know you shouldn't eat the pastry but you do it anyway because fuck it, but then you black out for a while, next thing you wake up in the nurse's office you're a little bit sore and you've got a few questions."

There are references to implied sex scandals such as "You'll be involved in a scandal with an East German swimmer", and "This is me with Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Aniston at the same time. We had a good time."

Adult Themes:

War: As Gino's story primarily takes place during WWII, there are many references to this throughout. There is references to the historical assassination of Togliatti. There are references to the appearance of Nazi's and Jew's (red armbands and yellow stars). Nazi soldiers are described to chase after a Jewish family with rifles drawn but the result of this isn't discussed. One character is confronted by soldiers who "come towards [him] with a rifle" before being released. Property destruction as a result of the war is described e.g. "burnt out farmhouses." Dangerous courier work during the war is described briefly.

Death: Gino's brother is described to have died in a car accident while cycling. Gino is also described to have died from a heart attack at old age.

Cancer: The character Gary talks about "a tumour" around the middle of the play, foreshadowing later events where it is revealed he has testicular cancer. He shows stress about the fact "I'M PROBABLY GOING TO LOSE MY BALLS!"

Substance abuse: One character is implied to be abusing substances as a coping mechanism: "Bottles line every surface, cigarettes smoke wafts through the air."

Injury/illness: Hew's character gets injured when he falls off a cliff during the race and this is described/physically depicted onstage : "A line of blood has cascaded from the top of Hew's head into his left eye." Both characters also are described to vomit profusely.

Mental illness: A character's mental illness is spoken about: "Nothing. / Darkness. / Blackness. / The void. / Existential void. / Psychiatrist made me paint that, it's my impression of my soul."

Child abuse: There is reference to the abuse/neglect of a character as a child: "your dad leaves you at a roadhouse two hours west of Coober Pedy with a compass, a roll of yarn and a blood bag and tells you to find your way home."

Restricted eating: Due to the nature of competitive long-range cycling, both characters demonstrate restricted eating behaviours to stay in their races.

Homophobia: When a male character brings another some flowers in hospital, he responds "I'm not a poof." The other character reprimands him for this: "NO!!! No!!! Gavin!!! No more. It's not cool! It's not appropriate!"

