



STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA



WHAT TO EXPECT

Trophy Boys

Trophy Boys written by Emmanuelle Mattana and directed by Marni Mount.

Note that this *What To Expect* contains spoilers.

The production runs for approximately 70 minutes, without interval.

Trophy Boys

Recommended for Ages 15+/ Yr 10, 11 and 12

Boys being boys.

It is the biggest night of Melbourne's academic calendar, the Grand Finale of the Year 12 Interschool Debating Tournament, and the all-boys team from the elite St Imperium College are ready to totally annihilate their sister school with the debate subject 'Feminism has Failed Women' arguing in the affirmative — until things take a dark turn...

What starts as a riotously funny satire becomes a deeper examination of insecure adolescent masculinity, entitlement and the ego of Australia's next generation of politicians and powerbrokers.

All characters are played by female, gender non-conforming and non-binary performers in drag. The performances begin larger than life, in caricature and camp, and only as the story develops does an unsettling naturalism pervade the work.

The play explores topics of misogyny, sexual assault, power and privilege, nepotism, toxic masculinity, rape culture, entitlement and the role of institutional complicity in fostering abuse.

Through the boys conversations, joking and conflict the play explores:

Pressure to be masculine

Toxic competitiveness

Attitudes towards women and sexism

Peer pressure and group behaviour

The cost of avoiding vulnerability

The play asks us to think about how systems and expectations shape behaviour, and whether young men are ever really taught healthier ways to express emotions or deal with failure.

It is fast, funny and sharp in style, drawing you in to uncomfortable conversations with humour, before the naturalism lands and you are left with a great deal to discuss.

Coarse Language:

The words 'f*ck' and 'f*cked' (and other variations) are said multiple times throughout the play. Other words used in passing are: 'sh*t', 'd*ck', 'sl*t', 'b*tches', 'f*ggot'. This language is used in a variety of ways, predominantly it is used in a casual way that represents how young boys speak. The slurs are not used directly at another individual but rather as part of everyday conversation. It is this casual nature that is most harmful, as we laugh at the 'light-heartedness' of this before realising these are harmful attitudes and comments.

Misogyny:

Trophy Boys explores the underlying culture of misogyny that we often see existing in elite all boys' private schools. This is frequently displayed through the way the boys talk about women and particularly their female opponents from their sister school. There is consistent subtext that implies that girls/women are less intelligent, less important, less morally 'good' than boys/men, that being like a girl is shameful and losing to girls is embarrassing.

"And I can't lose to girls!" (p.29)

"F*ck her up in the ass, man. They fully get home-ground advantage here too. No fair". (P.16)

"...they played dirty, so we just got even. They can't beat us fairly. They know it. We've beaten them in the finals every season from year seven to now. It's not a fair match, we're just better. By physiology or temperament, who knows? If they can't win off merit alone they'll do anything, including playing the woman card." (p.38)

"And f*ck those girls! F*ck those girls! Liars! Bitches! Sluts!" (p.42)

"Wearing heels is another example. They literally deform you. Mum wore heels for 30 years straight from the time she started interning at her first law firm. She thought it made her powerful, but it just made men stare at her pins. She still had to sleep her way to the top anyway like a slut and now her feet are f*cked." (p.20)

Sexual Assault references:

A key turning point in the play is when the boys discover a news article saying there has been an allegation of sexual assault against one of the Debating team from St Imperium "...Elite Year 12 schoolboy debater faces anonymous sexual assault allegation hours before historic final." (p.32)

The discovery of this article is in itself an example of how privilege allows you to believe you can play outside of the rules. They are in a locked room with debating rules dictating no use of computers and/or the internet when one of the boys discovers the article.

The boys discuss who the article might be referring to. Over the course of the play, it is revealed that each has been guilty of some form of sexual harassment, coercion or sexual assault. When talking about these instances there is no accountability by each of the boys and they brush it off as "just doing what teenage boys do" saying that they "haven't hurt anyone".

“Hey, Jared. I have something to say. I know your girlfriend didn’t want to give you bl*wjobs for ages[...]But that you’d keep asking anyway. Until eventually she did. She doesn’t really like it.” (p.51)

“You didn’t think it was unacceptable when I sent you, her nudes. [...] Yeah he has this folder, like a google drive[...] He collects them. There are hundreds of photos. Half our grade has access to it.”(p.55)

JARED: You told a girl that if she wanted to do year ten work experience at your dad’s law firm she had to have sex with you first.

SCOTT: And she did work experience with him!

JARED: She also had sex with you!

SCOTT: It was a joke!

OWEN: It is coercion! It. Is. Illegal.”(p. 53-54)

“...it was Jared’s 16th..[...] Owen was with this girl. They were just sitting on the couch, Jared was just handing them drinks, but then you [to OWEN] got up and you tapped me on the shoulder and said something to get me to come with you and you basically carried her upstairs, she could barely walk, she was tripping and falling and couldn’t speak, and she was tiny, I mean tiny. And we got upstairs and you took her into the room and closed the door and I just stood outside[...]and then you came out half an hour later and left her there and we both went downstairs. And... All I’m saying is, we’re talking about these things and these allegations and obviously we’ve all done some not good things but the paper and what it said, I just can’t help but think it’s about that night, and... Assault. What me, and Jared and Scott did that’s not. The same. You know?[...] I didn’t see anything... But I need to know, did you do something? Am I right for thinking...?” (p. 57)

Rape Culture

Rape culture is a central theme of Trophy Boys. We see this demonstrated throughout the play. Firstly, in the way the boys talk about the sexual assault allegation and sexual assault in general. They downplay the seriousness of the things they have done, not recognizing that they have caused harm. It is evident that the boys have a limited and skewed understanding of what sexual assault is, believing that rape is the only type of assault that’s truly serious and harmful. It is also apparent that they do not understand what would constitute a rape or sexual assault. There is little consideration for the girls’ feelings regarding the sexual assault allegation, questioning its validity. They suggest that the allegation is a lie fabricated with the malicious intention of causing the boys harm or impacting their ability to win.

We also see rape culture play out in their conversations with each other. Negative language and behaviour around their sexual status or being virgins, alongside the pressure for each to have engaged in sexual activity. There is occasional use of homophobic slurs to shame each other, with the implication that being gay would make them ‘less of a man’. There’s a sense that to be accepted they need to sexualize and have sex with women which encourages abusive behaviour.

There are moments where they nonchalantly objectify women. The boys appear totally oblivious to when the remarks they are making are misogynistic or offensive, in fact they view themselves as morally superior to other men and call themselves feminists.

“All night [...] you’d been showing off about whatever, like how much you liked boobs...”
(p. 56)

“I get it, Scott. It’s like, Instagram, man... You just scroll through your ‘for you’ page and it’s hot chicks everywhere. Boobs out. So sexy. So disempowering.”(p.20)

“Wearing make-up isn’t feminist. Women convince themselves it’s self-expression. Like art. You’re not a genius like Picasso, you’re lying to men so they sleep with you. Nothing feminist about that.” (p.21)

“Jared, who told me to ply her with drinks, just like he’s been doing to girls since year eight. Loosens them up. It was his party after all. Unsupervised. He knew what was going to happen. He invited that behaviour. Welcomed it. His mum too. Someone should really have words with her. And Scott. Years of homophobic remarks, shaming me for being a virgin, the peer pressure. The repulsive way he talked about women. All because he was a repressed homo himself.” (p.60)

“We. Don’t. Like. You. F*ggot.” (p.59)

Nepotism, Power and Privilege:

The play demonstrates how nepotism and the privilege obtained from family circumstances can be used to protect abusers. It fosters a culture where there are often no consequences to actions, and the effect they have on other people. A culture where abuse is allowed to happen and is ignored and hidden, often for those with money. It is also interesting to note that the boys are products of this environment. It is simply all they know.

David’s father Paul is a lawyer. It is mentioned multiple times that Paul could “protect” them from the allegations of sexual assault.

DAVID: Scott. Chill. There isn’t any proof. Someone made an Instagram post, so what? This stuff happens all the time. Both your parents are lawyers. You’re fine.

DAVID: Me neither. I would never do anything like that. It’s f*cked up. It’s foul. It makes me sick. [Beat] But I also want to say. You don’t have to lie to us. If someone here did it I want you to tell us and I want you to be honest. We won’t judge you. We won’t shame you. And we won’t tell a soul. If there is something you need to get off your chest then get it off right now so we know where we stand and what we’re dealing with. Don’t make a dick out of me by lying to us.

JARED: Guys. Paul is literally lawyer royalty.

SCOTT: He’s really good.

JARED: He’s represented everyone in court. [To Scott] Remember that time we met Geoffrey Rush?

OWEN: That is not good company!

SCOTT: It’s very — legally — very innocent company.

“...And I’ll have a really expensive lawyer too, won’t I, Scott? I’m sure Paul can give me mates rates — he wouldn’t want the name of his law firm tied to his f*cked up son who used it to coerce an underage girl into sex, would he? That’d be a pretty bad look.” (p.61)

Institutional Complicity

The play references the fact that institutions can be complicit in allowing abuse to occur by protecting and hiding abusers.

There is an implication that the school itself would protect the boys even if they are guilty. “...And we’ll be fine. We’re Imperium boys. They want to keep this quiet as much as we do. Who gives a f*ck about whatever some girl is saying. We can shut her up.” (p. 61)