

A movie poster for 'Trophy Boys' featuring four young men in school uniforms and straw hats. They are set against a blue background with falling gold confetti. The man on the right is holding a black sign with white text. The man on the left is making a hand gesture. The title 'Trophy Boys' is at the bottom in large white letters, with the writers and director names below it.

ST IMPERIUM  
DIV. 1 INTERSCHOOL  
DEBATING TEAM  
2024

# Trophy Boys

Written by **Emmanuelle Mattana**

Directed by **Marni Mount**



# Education Resources

## Synopsis

It's the biggest night of the academic calendar, the Grand Finale of the Year 12 Interschool Debating Tournament, the all-boys team from St Imperium College are ready to 'totally annihilate' their sister school until ...

Performed by a female and non-binary cast, the show unfolds in real-time as the boys are locked in a classroom for their one-hour prep, forced to argue that 'feminism has failed women'.

Aspiring future PM and brainiac scholarship kid Owen, joins soft boy-jock, Jared, dopey lawyer's son, Scott, and nerdy enigma, David, to come up with a case that will win them the debate - and save them from getting cancelled.

What begins as a humorous satire on insecure adolescent masculinity quickly shifts into a powerful interrogation of toxic masculinity, misogyny, and homophobia. *Trophy Boys* is a timely black comedy about power, privilege, and high school debating. Perfect for teachers and students examining how we navigate and negotiate the impacts of today's culture on young people.

## Context and Setting

*Trophy Boys* is set within the traditional structure of an Australian high school debating tournament. This involves two teams of four members, who take turns presenting three 6 – 8 minute speeches.

One team is allocated the affirmative while the other, the negative argument of a topic they receive at the commencement of their preparation window, which is a one-hour session without access to the internet or academic resources.

It is within this 'prep' window that the play takes place.

## Creative Team

Writer **Emmanuelle Mattana**  
Director **Marni Mount**  
Producers **Ben Andrews & Jo Dyer**  
Production Designers **Marni Mount, Ben Andrews, & Emmanuelle Mattana**  
Lighting Designer **Katie Sfetkidis**  
Sound Design, Graphic Design, Photography & Marketing **Ben Andrews**  
Stage Manager **Caitie Murphy**

## Cast

Owen **Emmanuelle Mattana** (she/they)  
Jared **Fran Sweeney-Nash** (they/them)  
David **Leigh Lule** (she/they)  
Scott **Gaby Seow** (she/her)



## Content Warning

*Trophy Boys* is recommended for ages 14+ as the play contains adult themes and sexual references.

The show includes coarse language, low level violence, homophobic and misogynistic slurs, sexually explicit content including references to sexual violence, underage sex, depictions of image-based abuse, loud shouting, flashing lights, amplified sound effects and music.

## Support

If you require support, or find any of the themes discussed distressing, we encourage you to reach out to any of the following free services.

[Lifeline](#): 13 11 44. Crisis support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Kids Helpline](#): 1800 55 1800. Counselling and crisis support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Beyond Blue](#): 1300 22 4636. Counselling available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[1800 Respect](#): 1800 737 732. National domestic family and sexual violence counselling service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Full Stop Australia](#): 1800 385 578. Crisis support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[NSW Sexual Violence Helpline](#): 1800 424 017. Crisis support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Q-Life](#): 1800 184 527. Counselling for LGBTIQ+ people available from 3pm to midnight, 7 days a week.





# Theatrical Styles

*Trophy Boys* utilises various theatrical styles and themes. Some of the relevant conventions used in the play are listed below.

## Comedy

Useful definitions associated with this genre include.

**Caricature:** An imitation of a character where certain aspects are exaggerated to create comic or grotesque effect. A caricature can be a way of mocking or criticising someone through the lens of humour.

**Stereotype:** A widely held view that oversimplifies the image or idea of a person, place or thing. Stereotyping in comedy can fall into one of two camps; either as a scapegoat for comedic effect or as a means to reduce the weight of a serious topic, in turn making the content more digestible.

General conventions of comedy include:

- Language Comedy including sarcasm, deliberate misuse of language, mondegreens and non-sequiturs
- Physical Comedy including slapstick, mime and clowning
- Repetition
- Miscommunication
- Mistaken Identity
- Imbalance of Status including the concept of punching up or down.

## Drag

Some resources believe that Drag was born out of necessity in the late 16th and early 17th centuries when men were required to perform female roles and wear long dresses and skirts in theatrical productions in England. This was due, in part, to the strict rules from the church, prohibiting women from participating in plays as they were seen as sinful and promoting pleasure.

Through this time in other European countries, women were involved in the theatre and sometimes performed male roles.

Women performing males' roles, coined 'breeches roles', was seen as highly political and a subversive way to have female voices heard.

During the early 20th century Drag as an artform came to life through Vaudevillian Acts and Pantomimes.

Vaudeville, also known as Variety Shows, were beloved by audiences and often saw acts containing dancing, singing, comedy, circus performers and magicians. They were ostentatious and showy, and several popular gender-bending artists including Bert Savoy, Rae Bourbon, Gladys Bently and Julian Eltinge emerged.

Pantomimes, on the other hand, were highly exaggerated performances based off children's stories (such as Snow White, Aladdin and Jack and the Giant Beanstalk) that leaned heavily into comedy and slapstick. They often had main roles in cross dress; older female characters played by men in dresses, and young male characters played by women in shorts. Audience participation was encouraged, and audiences often booed, yelled or cajoled at the actors.

In more modern times, underground ball and club culture in America led to the iconography of drag artists. Drag queens (and kings) used drag as a form of creative liberation utilising makeup, wigs and extravagant costumes to express themselves. Ru Paul's Drag Race is largely credited for popularising drag to the global community.

Modern drag archetypes can be found in music, movies, fashion, and more.

***"Drag is heightened performances of gender. So, we take all the ideas that make characters in this world, which are always gendered ideas, and we twist them around, exaggerate them, invert expectations, and create something new in the mixing of seeming opposites." Sasha Velour, drag queen and artist.***

***"Drag is an expansive and diverse art form, and my description here focuses on the elements of drag that are most relevant to Trophy Boys. In my mind, drag is about the heightened or stylised performance of gender and gendered stereotypes. It is a deeply queer artform, both in its historical foundation in the queer community, and in its approach to making what is 'normal' strange." Marni Mount, Director of Trophy Boys.***

***"Men putting on a dress is comedy, women putting on a suit is [still] considered threatening. So, I think it's more transgressive" Mo B Dick, drag king and co-creator of dragkinghistory.com.***

***"The thing we found playing drag, [was] we can sit up bigger, we can be louder, we can fill space, we don't have to be beautiful or small or quaint. It's a different way of performing [playing men] that has been so energising and brilliant." Emmanuelle Mattana, writer and cast member of Trophy Boys.***



## Queering

Queer Theatre is a genre that brings queer stories, creators and viewpoints to the foreground. This often includes subversions to heteronormative stereotypes that are expected in traditional theatre narratives.

Understanding what queering is, will be incredibly useful when analysing *Trophy Boys*. The term queering, or to queer, is popularly believed to be an act of disruptive activism that shifts perceptions away from normative dynamics and characteristics. This is particularly relevant when gender is the focus of queer disruption.

When discussing *Trophy Boys*, consider why the male roles are performed by women and non-men.

How would the meaning and comedy of the show shift if the cast were all men or male identifying?

***"What we are doing by having the characters played by female and non-binary performers instead of men is letting the audience know that we are in on the joke. We're saying, you can laugh at this, this is safe."*** Emmanuelle Mattana, writer of *Trophy Boys*.

## Parody and Satire

Parody is a humorous imitation of something where after creative revision, a new original work is produced. Satire on the other hand is a tool used to criticise or ridicule something through sarcasm, irony or character exaggeration. Satire generally makes a clear point of difference between the creator and the original work.

In essence, *Trophy Boys* is a satirical play that parodies the private schooling system as a way to critique and build commentary on historical events, social constructions and stereotypes.

## Black Comedy

Black Comedy or Dark Humour is a genre of comedy that adds a lightness to otherwise difficult subject matters. There is an inherent juxtaposition that occurs where the darkness is offset by the humour in surprising or unexpected contexts.

Common topics for Black Comedy, sourced from BBC Maestro:

- War and terrorism
- Death
- Sex and sexual deviancy
- Politics and political corruption
- Stereotypes
- Social issues.

Black Comedy uses comedy as a vessel to talk about dark events or topics that may be controversial or taboo. It can be a way to connect with audiences about shared experiences and provide a cathartic opportunity for discussion.





## Camp

Camp is a challenging concept to define. In these notes, the primary resource is Susan Sontag's essay *Notes on Camp*, published 1964.

Historically, Camp can be detected as early as the 18th century in art forms such as Gothic novels, opera, ballet, theatrical plays and paintings. Camp became an exaggerated expression of self, and often is associated with queerness and gay culture.

Camp is a sensibility that captures the extravagance of being in a performative and often absurdist way. There is a love for the manmade or the artificial and as such, Camp can become heavily tied to aesthetics and style. For some, Camp is worn like a badge of identity.

***"Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman". To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as a theatre."*** Susan Sontag, author of *Notes on Camp*.

***"Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style."*** Susan Sontag, author of *Notes on Camp*.

## Political Theatre

Political Theatre is a way to bring political issues into an alternative space and often reframes the content to allow for discussion, education or inspiration.

An excellent example of Political Theatre is German playwright Bertolt Brecht and his range of theatrical devices known as Epic Theatre and *Verfremdungseffekt*. His aim was to make the audience feel like they were watching a presentation of life through theatre, not a recreation of real life itself.

***"Political Theatre is a term that has been used to refer to different forms, theatrical styles or performances that comments on political/social/cultural issues, political action or protest that has a theatrical quality to it."*** NSW Education Standards Authority.

***"Art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality but a hammer with which to shape it."*** Bertolt Brecht.

***"Epic Theatre doesn't attempt to lay down a tidy plot and story, but leaves issues unresolved, confronting the audience with sometimes uncomfortable questions."*** Sam Marsden.



# The Characters

The four protagonists of *Trophy Boys* are deliberately crafted characters that sit within certain stereotypes. Consider what role each character plays in constructing the production's narrative.





## Meet the Characters

### Owen

Played by Emmanuelle Mattana.

Owen, 17, is a dork who doesn't realise he's a dork. He is earnest, self-important and almost too passionate about everything he does. He wants to be prime-minister and the voice of his generation at the same time.

### David

Played by Leigh Lule.

David, 17, is the quietest of the boys and the quickest to shut them down. He is somewhat of an enigma, often a thinker, rather than a talker. It's unclear whether the silence is a consequence of introversion or arrogance.

### Jared

Played by Fran Sweeney-Nash.

Jared, 18, is a classic high-school jock. He is tall, attractive and very charismatic. Whether he is smart is inconsequential. He leans into the soft-boy artist stereotype to appear more attractive to girls.

### Scott

Played by Gaby Seow.

Scott, 18, is Jared's right-hand man and best friend. Scott is unsure if he wants to be Jared or be with Jared. He is clumsy and often makes mistakes, especially when covering up his confusion about Jared. He is very prone to putting a foot wrong.

When analysing the characters consider their:

- Traits; the characters attributes or personality
- Status; the characters societal standing
- Objectives; the characters wants and desires
- Motivation; the reasoning behind the characters actions
- Obstacles; what stands in the characters way
- Actions; what the character does
- Stakes; what does the character risk gaining or losing.

## Body Language

After reading the character descriptions, consider how each actor portrayed their characters personality and point of view through their physicality. How did each actors' decisions shape your view of the narrative?

When looking at the characters body language consider the following:

- Eyeline and focus
- Physical movements
- Hand gestures
- Facial expressions
- Spatial relationship to other characters.

***"Owen moves at right angles. Everything in his body is tense. There is no curvature, only sharpness. His movements are quick, staccato, as though anxiety and adrenaline is coursing through him."*** Emmanuelle Mattana, writer and cast member of *Trophy Boys*.



# Production Roles

The production roles of *Trophy Boys* support the overall audience experience of the performance. From direction to design these roles are an integral part of a theatrical production.

## Directing

The role of the director in theatre involves capturing the intent, vision and structure of a script and creating an engaging and cohesive production.

In *Trophy Boys*, consider how the following compositional elements were shaped by directorial choices:

- Rhythm
- Atmosphere
- Focus
- Movement
- Use of space
- Tension
- Contrast.

***"Navigating the shift in tone was a vital part of our approach to staging the play, and we realised it with both performance and design choices. While there are glimpses of the darker themes in the play early in the text, they are mostly treated with a light and comic tone. The big shift begins at the revelation of the Guardian article (p.13-14). It is at this moment that the atmosphere in the room begins to change. At this point in the show a very slow but significant lighting change begins which drains the warmth from the stage."***

***From this point on, the performances gradually retreat from any sense of self-awareness on the part of the actors, so that by the end of the play they are fully immersed in the characters, earnestly pursuing their goals, rather than emphasising the satirical elements of their role. This gradual change accelerates at key moments, initially when Scott accuses Jared of coercing his girlfriend (p.26), then when Jared accuses Scott of coercing a girl (p.27), when Scott reveals that David has been collecting and distributing nude photographs of girls without their consent (p.28), and finally when David accuses Owen of sexual assault (p.29)." Marni Mount, director of Trophy Boys.***

***"You have to approach this [script] with a level of compassion as it's not about shitting on boys, it's about shitting on a system that forces boys to behave that way and viewing the real tragedy of that."***

Emmanuelle Mattana, writer of *Trophy Boys*.

## Costume Design

The costuming of *Trophy Boys* helps establish each character's personality. While the cast are all wearing the same school uniform the way they are styled is important and intentional. Look at the extension of styling to the small props like water bottles, backpacks and stationery, and how they are manipulated by the actors to tell a bigger story. Jared, for example, is described as a soft-boy jock and first walks onto stage with a large sports water bottle. Consider the symbolism of this and what the designer's intent was.

How each of the characters wore their uniforms shifted throughout the play, especially after the dance scene. What could you notice from their appearance or use of props that was an expression of their personality, and how did that shift?

For example:

- Owen with multiple pins and badges on the collar of his blazer
- David with the sleeves on his blazer and shirt rolled up
- Jared with loosely fitted socks and a sports watch
- Scott with a crumpled and untucked shirt and a loosely tied tie.

In addition to the clothing, make-up was a large part of the costume design for *Trophy Boys*, given the drag element of the work.

The masculine makeup incorporated subtle hints of facial hair. Consider why this was chosen over a more distinct facial hair prosthetic or makeup look.





## Set Design

The set of *Trophy Boys* is unique in the way it can adapt quite easily to different stages and spaces. The aim of the set design is to encapsulate the feeling of the debating classroom, adding context and visual references that audience members can recognise and appreciate.

Consider how the *Trophy Boys* set utilises the following elements:

- Space
- Place
- Symbols
- Situation
- Atmosphere.

***"This show really could work in almost any space. In debating you are slotted into the strangest of rooms for your hour of prep and as there are often a lot of small groups to accommodate, you might have been in an air-conditioned classroom attached to the library, a basketball court or a portable near the oval that time forgot. You might have had Latin verbs stuck all over on the walls, or [Explorers] posters downplaying the atrocities of European colonisation, or indeed photos of inspirational women in a humanities classroom."***

***Our design wanted to instantly satisfy that feeling of 'returning to the classroom' and whatever that elicits for the individual audience member... we wanted people's own gut responses to do the heavy lifting for us: here we are in this room with these boys and we're all probably a bit uncomfortable and not sure what's going to happen next."*** Ben Andrews, designer of *Trophy Boys*.


## Lighting Design

To simulate the stark brightness of a school classroom, the *Trophy Boys* lighting design uses fluorescent tube light boxes to provide a bright light wash with a slight greenish tinge. Overlaying the fluorescent lighting is a gradually shifting light wash that starts bright and warm and finishes cool blue and cold by the end of the play.

This subtly shows the passage of time whilst mirroring the mood of the performance. Starting friendly and excited and finishing cold and distant. The only point of difference is the dance scene to the song *Grind on Me* by Tricky Ricky where coloured roving lights create a non-naturalistic party aesthetic.

Consider how the lighting design enhanced your experience of *Trophy Boys*.





***"In terms of the context of the show, house parties are an important site of gendered violence within private school settings. But more than that, we wanted to make this show feel like a party. We always wanted to use comedy as a Trojan Horse to the gut punch of the serious discussion around sexual assault, and it was our intention to create a 'fun,' energetic space and tone at the top of the show."*** Emmanuelle Mattana, writer of *Trophy Boys*.

## Sound Design

Sound design is an important element to building atmosphere and tension in the play. The majority of *Trophy Boys* happens in relative silence, with a backing soundscape of everyday sounds that you hardly notice until they are taken away.

Consider how the sound design of *Trophy Boys* added to the overall delivery of the script.

***"In that moment Marni describes with the discovery of the Guardian article we also built a wall of sound from the beginning of the play with a nearly imperceptible stuffy room tone, clock ticking, cleaners vacuuming in the distance, culminating in a crescendo of notification sound effects and a building low drone creating a final volume build before Owen drops his MacBook Pro on the floor and we killed all sound effects to the first silence the audience hears since entering the space. The result was always incredibly powerful. You could hear a pin drop."*** Ben Andrews, designer of *Trophy Boys*.

## Recommended further reading

- Quarterly Essay: *The Reckoning* - Jess Hill
- *Even if You Beat Me* - Sally Rooney
- *Boys will be Boys* - Clementine Ford
- *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* - C.J. Pascoe
- *Consent Laid Bare* - Chanel Contos
- *Who Gets to Be Smart* - Bri Lee



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