

# LIKE STARS IN MY HANDS

NIDA

FESTIVAL  
OF EMERGING  
ARTISTS

25 - 28 MARCH

SPONSORED BY PRIME VIDEO

Studio Theatre, NIDA  
9:00 pm | 40 min (no interval)

By Timothy Conigrave | Edited by Tony Ayres | Directed by Esther Dougherty

This production contains sexual content, semi-nudity, and references to drug use. Some material may be confronting. Audience discretion is advised. Subject to change in the development of the production.

**In the final stages of an AIDS-related illness and trying to make sense of what's to come, Simon finds a new lover for his boyfriend Marcello – their good friend Jimmy.**

**Set in Sydney in 1993, amid the sex, drugs and the pulse of Darlinghurst and written by Timothy Conigrave ( *Holding the Man* ), this is a portrait of queer love, loss and resilience at the height of the AIDS crisis; intimate, unflinching and profoundly human.**

## THE COMPANY

### CAST (in order of appearance)

Simon:	Bradley Bulger
Marcello:	Tom Findlay
Jimmy:	Sam Laki
Voice:	Sellma Soul*
Director:	Esther Dougherty
Costume, Props & Set Designer:	Carmi Pirola
Lighting Designer:	Jonathan Ogilvie
Sound Designer:	Bella Muslado
Intimacy Consultant:	Bree Peters*
Magic Consultant:	Adam Mada*

Voice Coach:	Angela Sullen*
Production Manager:	Archer Dametto*
Company Stage Manager:	Lola Hunt
Production Assistant:	Billy Charlton*
Construction Manager:	Luca Mark
Costume Supervisor:	Karamea Gostt
Systems Manager & Environmental Sustainability Coordinator:	Alexandria White

\*Guest Artist

\*\* NIDA Staff

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Stumbling across a spine in the NIDA Library that read 'Tim Conigrave' and finding two short plays inside was so precious. Timothy Conigrave's autobiography,  *Holding the Man* , meant a lot to me, and to so many. So it was a gift to discover these plays that he'd written;

published and originally staged as double-bill;  *Thieving boy & Like Stars In My Hands* .

*Like Stars In My Hands*  is a work that's whole mechanism is empathy. In the early 90s, Tim cared for his Italian-Australian partner, John, while he was

passing away from an AIDS-related illness. In this work, the Italian-Australian character, Marcello, is the one who cares for his dying partner, Simon. We can assume that there was here, an exercise made by Tim, to understand these two roles, to stand in his partner's place.

*Like Stars* was unfinished in Timothy's life. He passed away from an AIDS-related illness in 1994. His friend, Tony Ayres, picked up the half finished script, and completed the work as editor. *Like Stars In My Hands* contains all these layers of attempt to break through boundaries of self and other, and to profoundly know, to profoundly love.

Timothy Conigrave was a NIDA student in the mid 80s. It's a privilege to be bringing his work to the stage

again in a place he spent so much time in. We, the company, as artists, are all too young to have known the AIDS crisis. We are working to try and understand this experience, because that effort does matter. It can be easy in our busy lives that are filled with so much information to alienate ourselves from other people's tragedies. But the theatre offers us a sophisticated empathy machine, where we embody in liveness codes of emotion. Placing these words, these actions, these images and objects back into the room again, might do a trick, might be able to shake up how we feel for one another, might call us in to not give up on our attempts to profoundly know, and profoundly love.

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## DIRECTOR ESTHER DOUGHERTY

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Esther Dougherty is a playwright and director from Magandjin (Brisbane). Since graduating a BFA Drama at QUT in 2016, they have written and directed four original plays: *The Moon Men* (2015), *Pawpaw Dog & Other Dog* (2021), *Slippery* (2022) and *Zagazig* (2023). They have presented their shows independently, and in fringe and LGBTQIA+ festivals around the country.

Esther's practice embraces strangeness, queerness, comedy, and contemporary forms. They run their own theatre company, Curtain World, and perform in drag as Small Paul. In 2022 Esther's play *Pawpaw Dog & Other Dog* was published by Playlab Theatre. In 2025, Esther's play *Slippery* was nominated for three Matilda Awards (Best Costume, Best Ensemble, and The Lord Mayor's Award for Best New Australian Work).

They are currently studying a Masters of Fine Arts (Directing) at NIDA.

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*Thank you to Resolution X (ResX). Thank you to the students from Diploma of Live Production & Technical Services for assistance during bump-in.*

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