



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: Amateur Players of Sherborne

Name of Production: Our Country's Good

Venue: Sherborne Studio Theatre

Date: 9th June 2026

Adjudicator: Tash Moore

Timberlake Wertenbaker's classic 1988 play continues to be staged by both professional and amateur companies. The relatable themes continue to resonate with both creatives and audiences; hierarchy and status, the justice system, corruption and the abuse of power, deportation as a means of punishment, rebellion and colonisation. This is a play within a play that highlights the cultural value of theatre and the power it has to influence and transform. It creates empathy by shifting perspectives and celebrates the form's accessibility. It is typically played by a small cast who undertake multiple roles, including those of both convict and Marine. Many productions opt for costume changes to be seen on the stage, drawing attention to the actor as they transition into a different character, thereby encouraging the audience to recognise the psychological connections between the characters each actor plays. For the cast, their challenge is in defining vivid characters as they switch from one to another. For the Director, it's finding the tonal contrasts in the piece as it explores challenging themes in often distressing scenes, interspersed with the comedic rehearsal scenes. This production was clearly a labour of love for Jane McKenna who not only directed the production, but was also credited for the set design and realisation, for making the military costumes, co-credited for making the convict's costumes, sourcing the props and designing the programme! The company worked hard to immerse the audience into the world of Botany Bay in 1788 and presented the piece with some of their own, unique adaptations.

SET & STAGING

The audience were greeted by the Front of House staff dressed in military regalia before taking in the space (as the auditorium was decorated wooden panelling, a Red Ensign flag, a portrait of King George III and vibrant Indigenous Australian artwork) and the pre-show which commenced an astonishing 30 minutes ahead of the play starting. Seven convicts sat huddled aboard a ship with three guards watching over them. Gentle movement was incorporated and a bell was occasionally rung, accompanied by sound effects of the waves as they continued their brutal, arduous journey from Portsmouth to Sydney Cove. A raised platform stage left suggested an extension of the ship's interior with wooden panelling features across the left wall and a step up to this playing space that was used on occasions as part of the blocking. Dressing around this area included netting, chains and a pair of caged chickens that were referenced later in the dialogue. Various candles were dotted across the stage and pebbles were used as dressing around numerous areas including on the floor of

the auditorium which was indeed later used as a playing space. The wall behind the raised platform sported a variety of pictures of convicts in frames and a noose hung ominously to the right of this wall and a large union jack was suspended across half of the stage. Access points included the wings, the central vomitorium and the auditorium left door. Rock features framed either side of the stage which were finely constructed and dressed with moss. Finally, completing the overall aspect and enhancing the location, the floor of the stage was painted with a mottled sand effect. The set successfully suggested the various locations in the play, which is no mean feat with such a limited playing space and as is typical for this society, the construction was of the highest standard.

As the play started, a musical track featuring strings was played and this was replaced by various members of the cast singing a folk song. They signalled the entrance of two Marines bringing on Sideway through the auditorium, one of them banging a drum and the other tying him to the mast of the ship downstage left. His back featured effective make up effects to suggest that he had been cruelly flogged. Moving into Scene Two, the union jack was removed and the focus was neatly drawn to the black and white image of a First Nations person sat on a yellow back hung stage right. It was reassuring to see the role of Killara (this APS production adopted the name that was used by the 2024 Lyric Hammersmith production) portrayed with authenticity, although unfortunately the quality of the audio recording wasn't the best so I don't believe the audience could fully comprehend the character's dialogue, which was a real shame. However, I fully appreciate the time and effort taken in sourcing Warren Clements to provide the voice over for the short Killara scenes. The back cyclorama was revealed in the third scene, with a digitally printed image of a beach serving an appropriate setting for many of the scenes. Dressing in front of this included marine life such as starfish, mossy rocks and further pebbles. The four characters were spaced across the mid-stage area and minimal blocking was used in this scene, with Tench then moving to sit on the stage left platform to communicate his disapproval.

Scene Four was set stage right where a skeleton of Ralph's teepee tent was positioned amidst plentiful greenery and some attractive tropical flowers across the front of the stage. To the left, small crates and stools were positioned that were used throughout various scenes both inside and outside of this location. Further candles were scattered throughout this area and dressing here included a snake coiled on one of the crates. Ralph pre-set his stool and when Harry entered, he picked up a stool to join him. Movement included Harry rising in agitation when talking about Handy Baker. Scene Five was a little more animated in terms of blocking as Meg made advances on Ralph, and Sideway engaged in a demonstration as he lifted Ralph's handkerchief. Ralph remained seated so that Sideway had to bend down to effectively plead his case.

The transition into Scene Six included a folk vocal/guitar track as Duckling swept the platform and folded a blanket, and Caesar carried a net and basket of fruit. Presumably this 'business' was created to afford time for some speedy costume changes. Ralph positioned one stool and three slim crates in a row across the stage so when the company entered the four central characters occupied these whilst the others stood positioned around them. This is one of two scenes that feature a volume of characters and in such a small space, the blocking was understandably limited throughout. Harry set up Scene Seven with oars placed into the rope loops at the top of two crates. He sat on a crate and another was placed on its side to create a lower level for Duckling who sat, morose throughout his opening speech. The actors played out this scene well, despite their positioning preventing them from readily looking at one another. Music was brought in across the end of this scene as Harry helped Duckling out of the boat and they held a long embrace, which potentially impacted the shock factor of Duckling's declaration of love for Harry in Act Two, Scene Eight.

Act One, Scene Eight opened with Dabby sat on the floor using the pebbles to map out her escape route, which was a lovely choice. She then moved downstage during her exchange with Mary before

getting crates to sit down and rehearse. Liz entered noisily through the vomitorium before shooing Dabby away and taking her seat. Liz delivered an enthusiastic salute and grin to close the scene which was mirrored at the end of Act Two, Scene One. The strings track used to transition into Scene Nine continued underneath Ralph's dialogue which may have been distracting (here and in later scenes) for some. He stood and removed his jacket as he remarked on the climate, thereafter Ketch successfully crept on unnoticed to startle Ralph into standing stage left. As Ralph regained his composure he took to his usual stool stage right. Scene Ten found Mary writing, seated on the platform as Wisehammer moved bricks from the centre of the stage to pile them against the left wall. The company (within the company) filled the stage for Scene Eleven, with Ralph meeting them on stage having entered through the auditorium and Ketch hovering in the background initially. They cleared to sit on the platform as they rehearsed the Plume/Worthy scene with Sideways ducking off upstage left to make his comedic 'theatrical' entrance. He inspected those sat in the 'audience' as he accused them of stealing his handkerchief and in turn they recoiled as he leaned in close to them. We were introduced to Caesar who hailed from Sicily in this production which was an astute adaptation. He then shuffled upstage along with Sideway where they observed Liz and Mary rehearse the next scene and as Liz struggled to get into her character, Dabby and Duckling laughed at Ralph's comment to "*try and act them.*" The quiet Tuesday night audience relaxed a little and the first laugh of the evening came on Liz's line, "*I robbed a few.*" The company worked well in this scene and the pace gained energy as they discussed food. Campbell's laughter off stage signalled his entrance and Ross intimidated the convicts with a large makeshift baton. They cowered in his presence with fear, effectively communicating the control he held over them.

Act Two opened with another pre-show, this time with Wisehammer standing in chains and three further accused convicts sat with shackles on their wrists. They were supervised by a Marine standing upstage of them, and the large union jack flag returned on stage for this first scene. The actors delivered a fine performance of this opening scene which concluded with another jubilant picture of Liz holding her new fan as the lights came down and the flag was struck once more. Scene Two featured an insightful exchange between Phillips and Ralph. Here, the Director allowed the play do the talking as the two characters simply sat on their stools to discuss key themes such as punishment and redemption. Harry was positioned on the platform for Scene Three and used his stool to communicate his distress but a greater exploration of the character's physicality would have been interesting to see here.

Scene Five opened with a strong picture; Ross took centre stage, the accused convicts perched on the platform and the rest of the cast were standing stage right with Ralph. Similarly, Scene Six opened with a simple picture of Liz knelt on the floor with Harry and Ketch framing her and she was forced into standing as Ketch measured her. The blocking in Scene Seven supported the narrative and therefore the audience's understanding of the changing relationship dynamics between certain characters, with an enjoyable burst of energy from Arscott as he leapt onto the platform to rehearse his Kite speech. Music and sound effects were heavily used across Scene Eight and Duckling was again positioned a little awkwardly beside Harry's body as it lay on the platform. Scene Ten was brilliantly delivered by the cast with a good sense of pace, awareness of relationship and status. I really enjoyed the choice to let Liz's line "*Speaking*" land with a brief silence so the audience could readily acknowledge the significance of this.

The 'company' returned in readiness for the final scene as they prepared for their production, with Duckling changing on the platform and the upstage flag was brought back in. Mary and Wisehammer stood by the auditorium door for their aside whilst they put on their coats, but as they were positioned beside the venue's bin and were dimly lit, this took them out of the world of the play a little. However, when Mary and Ralph stood in front of the treads on the auditorium floor for their aside, this worked well. The poignant moment held nicely as each character uttered "*Tomorrow*"

and looked out front, although unfortunately Liz was masked for her line. The company built the energy of this final scene, concluding as they clustered around the flag to watch Caesar and Arscott take to the stage (as imagined in the left wing) with music to conclude as per the script. The Director added a speech from John Newton and a performance of *Amazing Grace* sung in both Yolŋu and English to “*return focus and reflection to the present day*”. The company all changed into t-shirts and carried a candle close to their faces, placing them onto the stage towards the end of the number. This was quite a diversion from the original ending but given the playwright’s passion for political theatre, one could readily imagine that she would not be opposed to this; “*We will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little.*”

COSTUME

Jane McKenna’s military uniforms were exquisitely made with no doubt endless hours of historical research informing each and every detail including the facings and distinctions to signal the rank of individual characters. This fine tailoring itself must have been a full-time pursuit; how Jane managed this alongside all of her other roles is quite a phenomenal achievement. The Royal Marine characters wore red or navy coats with beige breeches, black headwear and shoes with buckle details. The Reverend’s long coat featured attractive gold patterns and edging and Phillips wore a nicely styled Peruke wig underneath his hat. Jane and Annie Price also did a marvellous job in creating the convicts’ costumes. Meg appeared in a corseted top with a long skirt and one glove. Her face and arms were dirtied and one tooth was blackened. Sideway wore a ragged grey top with brown trousers, broken shoes and a sadly worn yet still charming jabot and Dabby wore a long green skirt, a brown cap and a shawl. Mary’s costume included a peach skirt, a blouse and her long hair was loose. In Act Two when she undressed her undergarments included a corset and bloomers. Liz looked the part in her ragged costume and backcombed hair. Ketch donned a knitted beige hat with his rags whereas Wisehammer wore a green knitted kippah. Caesar appeared in a long green waistcoat over his ragged clothes, a brown and green scarf and had cuts applied across his face and one arm. The cast of The Recruiting Officer changed into items of costume in the final scene, including a crinoline, gorgeous blue ballgown and a wig for Liz, a further wig for Sideways, a maid’s cap, shirt and apron for Dabby and coats for Mary and Wisehammer. The full company returned for the Director’s epilogue in black t-shirts featuring the image of a yellow bird; presumably an acknowledgement of the complex, ongoing struggles for the First Nations Peoples of Australia.

PROPS

Sideway was flogged using a ‘cat o nine tails’ in the first scene, and the characters in Scene Three carried rifles, Davey used a spyglass and Phillips made use of a walking cane. Ralph placed his parchment and jug of ink on a wicker tray whilst using a quill to write in various scenes. Scene Five props included the scripts for the play and in Scene Six the characters carried metal tankards of varying shapes and sizes. During Scene Ten, Mary used a quill to copy the script into a blank manuscript and Wisehammer moved small bricks. A broken corner of a plank was used to suggest Melinda’s fan in Scene Eleven, which was replaced with a feathered version in Act Two, Scene One which also featured Arscott’s ‘compass’. Further props used in Act Two included a white ceramic bottle as used by Harry, Ross carried a traditional spear and Ketch used a knotted rope to measure Liz. In the final scene Dabby used a handheld mirror and applied make up from a shell using a brush, Meg applied Liz’s make up and Sideway brought on a pouch that contained salt.

SOUND

Various tracks were used not only across scene transitions, but also across scenes. Effects across the first scene included the gentle sounds of the waves, the occasional creak of the ship and cued moments for the flogging of Sideway. The Killara track was mixed with a nice reverb, although the quality lacked clarity which I am sure was simply due to the recording facilities available to the actor. These scenes were accompanied by Indigenous Australian music featuring the didgeridoo. Scene

Four's nighttime track included effects of crickets over the continuing waves, and this was also used across Scene Six. A baroque strings and brass piece played across the scene change from Act Two Scene One into Scene Two which contrasted the discordant strings that set the tone for Scene Three and this track played for the entirety of the scene with occasional laughter interspersed at the top, along with the usual ambient background effects. The sound of whipping was heard offstage at the end of Scene Five and the murmurs in the audience could be heard throughout the final scene with the effects of applause as the performance started. All cues were neatly mixed, balanced and delivered and the dialogue throughout was ably projected across the auditorium.

LIGHTING

The warm orange pre-show state lifted the left half of the stage. Additional cans with orange gels were positioned above the stage left platform to focus this area when required and the coverage across the stage from the rig was solid. This initial state intensified as the play started, and Sideway was nicely focussed when he was positioned for the flogging. The second scene contrasted beautifully, with a sharp white special on the picture of Killara. Ralph sat on a stool stage right during Scene Four and was lifted with a blue state to suggest the time of day. An upstage can was used to depict the moon over the bay during nighttime scenes, which was a simple and effective touch. The time of day and location were suggested by the use of colour and intensity selected for each state throughout. The slow fade on the conclusive picture to Scene Eight was neatly executed, a device also used for the end of the first act and the opening scene of Act Two. Act Two, Scene Three featured a dim state which worked well tonally, and a bright state for Scene Five nicely contrasted the usual state used for the Killah scenes. Scene Five concluded with a fade but not to black, which was a great choice so the transition into Scene Six with a softer state was swift. Ralph and Mary's love scene was lit with a lovely balance of blue in the mix and the final scene contrasted well with the atmospheric epilogue which was mostly lifted by the candles carried by the cast.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

David Pileri as John Caesar: David provided lovely vocals in the opening folk tune and an energised performance as Caesar in Scene Eleven, clearly rushing on in a state of panic but not giving anything away with regard to the attempted escape. He stood with Sideway and together they provided excellent background action as they watched Liz and Mary rehearse, nodding their approval as Mary gained confidence in her character.

Andrew Middleton as Wisehammer: Wisehammer's opening speech was delivered with sad desperation, contrasting his thoughtful reflections in Scene Ten with Mary as he gently placed a comforting hand on her shoulder when she spoke about her shyness. He was suitably uncomfortable on the question about Kable's whereabouts in Scene Eleven and gently pleaded with Mary in Act Two, Scene Seven but perhaps already understood that it was to no avail.

As Captain Watkin Tench: his cynicism was firmly communicated from the offset. His discourse continued into Scene Six as he got up to leave on "*It's a waste.*" Andrew drew a neat distinction between these two characters and contributed much to the full company scenes.

Patrick Knox as Governor/Captain Arthur Phillips: Patrick delivered a poised introduction to this intelligent character in Scene Three, demonstrating empathy in his response to Thomas Barrett's story. He took gentle command in Scene Six and it was easy to understand why Phillips was well-regarded and respected. Act Two, Scene Two was a highlight as the character articulately communicated the key themes and messages of the play to the audience whilst empowering Ralph to lead with confidence. This was a most enjoyable performance.

Clive Miller as Judge David Collins: Clive shared a warm introduction to this likeable character whose intellect and passion for his surroundings ingratiated him with the audience from the offset.

He chaired the debate in Scene Six with confidence, only to momentarily lose his patience following Tench's barb. It was pleasing to see this character return in Act Two, Scene Ten as he provided an apt insight into Liz's situation. He spoke with kindness and a clear sense of impartiality which starkly contrasted Ross' approach.

As Robert Sideway: This jovial and well-meaning character was played with energy as he fondly remembered his London days with Ralph in Scene Five. His gestures were suitably theatrical with sweeping arms and low bows as he begged to join the company. Clive had fun with the character in Scene Eleven, holding his arms wide on his entrance only to realise his mistake. Thereafter he threw himself on the floor in melancholic fashion, fully embracing the humour in this scene.

Sam Frost as Lieutenant Ralph Clark: the character's repressed disposition was established in his manner of speaking and a prim physicality as he sat on his stool with his legs placed together and his hands clasped. His outburst ("*Why not?*") in Scene Six was effective, drawing everyone's attention before imparting a passionate defence of the theatre. Ralph lost his patience during Ketch's ramblings in Scene Nine, and Sam judged the pace astutely on this whilst maintaining clarity in the dialogue. He watched jealously over Mary and Wisehammer's exchanges in Act Two, Scene Seven and the sarcastic delivery of "*I doubt it*" in response to Wisehammer's request raised a laugh.

Gary Brooks as Midshipman 'Harry' Brewer: Harry did his utmost to remain upbeat in Scene Seven as he attempted to cajole Duckling into conversation but failed somewhat. Gary drove the character's anger and frustration throughout the scene which peaked as he shouted, "*you filthy whore*". His mental distress escalated to dangerous levels in Act Two, Scene Three and the character was evidently not lucid in Scene Five.

As Captain Jeremy Campbell: Gary revelled in Campbell's drunkenness and his deplorable behaviour in Scene Six was brilliantly delivered.

As John Arscott: This character was endearingly played, with his naivety exposed as he shared his 'compass' with the other convicts. Gary did well to navigate not just the quick changes, but also the swift leaps from one character to the next, particularly moving from Act Two Scene Six into the following scene.

Rosi Castle as 'Shitty' Meg: Meg cackled heartily as propositioned Ralph and made her meaning clear on the series of derogatory terms she used. This was a memorable cameo.

As Lieutenant William Dawes: Dawes' indifference extended beyond the discussion about whether or not to stage the play. Here was one character who was happy living in such a foreign land, so long as they could be left to their studies in their observatory.

Charlotte Berry as Mary Brenham: In her opening scene, Charlotte pushed the character's timidity whilst making her shrewd nature known. Her closed in shoulders and low eye level communicated her nervous disposition, which was forgotten as she gained confidence 'on stage' or when in the company of those she felt comfortable with, such as Dabby and Wisehammer. She tightly clutched her script in Scene Eight as Dabby recounted their traumatic journey and it was evident that Mary was firmly under Dabby's control. She managed to move on from this haunting memory with girlish excitement on "*Because that's acting*". Charlotte worked well with Andrew (Middleton) in Scene Ten, demonstrating her intellectual curiosity throughout their discourse and pride on "*I have the biggest part*." Her unease in the company of Ralph was finally forgotten in Act Two, Scene Nine as Mary adopted different characters and it was enjoyable to see her relax and let loose here.

As Lieutenant George Johnston: Charlotte made a very quick change moving into Scene Six, effectively placing her hair under Johnston's hat. She supported the scene well with some drunken background action in response to the arguments made.

Bev Taylor-Wade as 'Dabby' Bryant: Bev has an easy, comfortable presence on the stage. Therefore, it was easy for the audience to relate to this outgoing character who in her first scene demonstrated enthusiasm for the play and was amused by Silvia's story. Bev was evidently a key member of the cast, bringing energy and focus to all of her scenes. She worked well with others such as Mary and Duckling and clearly communicated her disapproval for Liz as they first embarked on rehearsals. She gently persisted with her dream to return to Devon and when she earnestly shared her escape plan in the final scene, the rest of the cast responded with horror. Unperturbed, she went on to make her meaning known as she mentioned her "*future success*" to Ralph.

As 2nd Lieutenant William Faddy: This was an articulate, thoughtful portrayal. Again, Bev supported the scene expertly whilst subtly communicating the character's views without drawing attention from the dialogue. Her telling look to Ralph on the line, "*I don't trust the director*" was enjoyable to watch. Both characters were carefully considered and confidently played.

Maureen Nethercott as Liz Morden: Maureen played this rebellious character with a pleasing cockney accent and she firmly held her stout posture throughout. She was unapologetically confrontational with those around her including Ralph, fearlessly getting close in order to intimidate him during their first exchange. Her defensiveness was easy to identify in Scene Eight as she avoided reading. Maureen effectively ran the character's lines together in Scene Eleven and pushed her indignance on "*I haven't finished yet.*" The audience enjoyed her portrayal of "*a lady*" that comedically included her hands needing to be placed on her hips. This light development of the character was undone by the end of first act as Liz was left in fear for her life, and Maureen played her anguish with commitment. Her delivery of Liz's well-known monologue at the top of Act Two was strong, with a firm understanding of the language. The pace was astutely judged and Maureen used intonation to add colour and intrigue, including a lower voice to indicate when she was quoting her father. It was easy to empathise with this character as she concluded her story resigned to her fate. Act Two, Scene Five concluded with the character in a state of distress, rocking on the floor as she listened to Arscott's cries offstage. Maureen developed the character well throughout and thanks to this, the audience were invested in her character's journey which is pivotal in this play.

Andrew Holt as Major Robbie Ross: Ross dominated Scene Six with steadfast negativity and he effectively threatened the convicts in Scene Eleven as Andrew believably portrayed this cold character. In Act Two, Scene Five his humiliation of Dabby was cruel and the character was filled with loathing in Scene Ten. Here, the long list of offences was superbly delivered and phrased with command.

As 'Ketch' Freeman: Andrew's amenable Ketch was haplessly rejected by those around him, making a swift retreat from the ladies' spurns in Scene Eight. He gently measured Liz in Act Two, Scene Six but his monotone defence was certainly never going to convince anyone, least of all Liz. Andrew did a great job in crafting these two vivid characterisations which provided much food for thought in terms of how they contrasted one another, particularly with regard to their views of justice and their willingness to exact punishment on others.

Hazel Perrett as 'Duckling' Smith: In her first scene, Duckling expressed disgust at the idea of speaking with certain women at the camp and fought back tears as Harry verbally attacked her in Scene Seven. Silence was her only power and means by which to rebel, and her resentment in this scene was plain to see. She fiercely defended Harry in Scene Eleven and broke down over his body in Act Two, Scene Eight. Thereafter, Hazel supported scenes well and it was pleasing to watch her relationship with Dabby grow across the rehearsal scenes.