

**Lighting The Way**  
**Stage2 Youth Theatre**

**Crescent Theatre 2.45pm 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022**

**Stage2's Lighting the Way** combines nine published short plays with three pieces of original writing by **Stage2** members, woven together with three more original pieces by **Stage2** Artistic Director **Rosie Nisbet** and scored by musician (and member) **Joel Fleming**. It is a hard-hitting, imaginative, heartfelt exploration of the climate crisis, performed with skill, passion, and confidence by almost 50 young people, many of whom have never performed on a stage before. **Rosie** works with Assistant Director **Amit Mevorach** to curate a cohesive piece of theatre from loosely linked scenes, to great effect.

We open with a table and chairs in the centre of the space, a throne-like chair/altar in front of a backdrop of green leaves and fairy lights on one side, and a mountain of rubbish (think of a storey-height Christmas tree, draped with broken lampshades, shopping baskets, plastic bag upon plastic bag upon discarded flooring) on the other. In front of this stands **Rose Gilliam** as Annie, innocently playing with a toy boat in a fish tank of crystal-clear water.

The first piece brings the audience straight into the heart of climate crisis terror, as swarms of young people circle the stage like "ants circling" in a "suicide spiral" as we head towards the sixth mass extinction. The words (beautifully written by member **Louis Delaney**) are woven together by whispers from the company and the clear, engaging storytelling of **Elinor Longley**. These words set the tone for the show as urgent and impassioned, highlighting a topic that the audience won't be able to ignore for the next two hours.

A slick emptying of the stage leaves only Annie, telling three versions of the story of Red Riding Hood to her mother, played by **Eve Hack-Myers**, who later multi-roles impressively into a Northern accented photographer forced to try and "make something horrific attractive". In this scene we see the impressive **Leena Patel** play a bolshy, confident, no-holds-barred, bottle-of-Malbec-in-her-basket-for-Granny Laila (aka Red Riding Hood). In the story's first draft she meets a wolf, played with great expression by **James Woodman**, and we see the story play out mostly as we remember (though with a couple more guns than I remember...). Over the next two drafts, the forest is destroyed by Laila's flower-picking and the wolf dies from hunger, until we are left with no wolf, and no forest. Within each draft we are treated to **Phoebe Preston's** hard-stared, gun-wielding Grandma. A stark contrast to the loving, homely Grandma we get to see her play later on.

In **Stage2** productions a scene change is never wasted, and the next cast sweep into the space to effortlessly transform it into a courtroom. I was particularly impressed to discover that this scene was written by a member (**Lauren Brine**). We see a number of witnesses called to the stand. First a cold, yet engaging, Dr Coleman (**Moriah Potter**), laughing in the face of eco-friendliness, fake smile plastered on her face, landing every beat of her argument. Next, a very expressive Benjamin Faddon (**Krrish Mehta**) (who later pens a short play of their own in the second half) stating the case that zero emission is an unrealistic hope. After that, a passionate yet restrained Dr Gresha Buchanan (**Anna Jobs**), whose looks to the defence counsel could kill. Finally we see a very clearly spoken climate activist Ash Robinson (**Indigo Perrett**) asking us "when did wanting a future become classed as greed?". The writing is excellent, the arguments offer thought-provoking contrast, and **Lauren Brine**

and **Oscar Peters** play Prosecution and Defence with great authority. Defence is smarmy, strong. Prosecution is professional, empathetic, and Lauren gives *Jodie Comer in Prima Facie* vibes. Our Judge (played with assurance and a glint in her eye by **Alice Berrill**), opens and closes with the “unsatisfaction of an unconventional ending”. One great satisfaction in this piece was watching the Court Clerk (**Lewis Grego**) become more and more obviously bored with proceedings, earning the first big laugh of the night, before moping back to the central table with constant, stable yet silent Typist **Bella Bailey**.

Our Judge disrobes, hashtags, and unwraps her favourite chocolate bar, taking us into a piece about the deforestation caused by the production of chocolate. **Leena Patel** returns with lovely movement work as the spirit of many things, including the Amazon – no, not that one (“screw you, Jeff Bezos!”) - as we see our own consciences mirrored onstage by **Alice Berrill**. After all, aren’t we all trying? Not hard enough.

We’re next taken into the first of three scenes written by Director **Rosie Nisbet**. In it she cleverly reuses the Prosecutor character from the courtroom scene, and introduces **Fi Lawrence-Petrioni**, who brings an impossible proposal to the door. World over-population is unsustainable. Do we intervene, or give in? They think they’ve found the answer: release a man-made virus ‘accidentally’, not for mass genocide, but to save the species. With the last couple of years of Covid-19 as a backdrop in our minds, it’s a tough scene to watch, but the actors deal with it magnificently.

Now **Joel Fleming**’s music starts to take a front seat! We hear synths, guitars, drums, and realise how effortlessly the composition has been matching each short play so far. The mountain of rubbish becomes a focal point for this scene too, and images of pollution appear over the balconies. **Roma Pallan** and **Eve Hack-Myers** perform a scene with excellent General American and Northern English accents respectively, about the compromises we make in art and journalism. After all, people “would just look away” if faced with photos of baby dolphins with cups on their noses. Wouldn’t we?

Joel’s music becomes homely and comforting as **Fi Lawrence-Petrioni** returns to the stage as Mavis, this time with partner Mack (the very likeable **Alec Charles-Peers**, with a bright and friendly Aussie accent, full of optimism). Whilst trying to find a seaweed-based alternative to bacon, they stop their conversations every few minutes to wave out of the window at holidaymakers on their glamp-berg holiday. It’s as surreal as it sounds – holidaying on an iceberg! The actors play very well together, with chemistry and contrast, and it’s an interesting vision of being as burnt out in the future as we are now.

Beautiful piano chords bring us into a short piece about donating menstrual products to Women’s Shelters. I’m delighted that this new piece by Rosie was added, having recently read about the difficulty those in need have with accessing clean water for the use of moon cups. **Evie Mumford** does an excellent job at providing voices for the underrepresented in the face of privileged do-gooders. But we do feel for the two donating when they’re told, “Not everyone can do their bit.”

The music builds and the blue lights come on as **Elinor Longley** returns to storytelling, and we get to see a beautifully synchronised performance piece from the whole company. We have blue scarves, waves, and choral speaking, as Elinor leads the ensemble in a letter from the ocean (not an easy job!). Annie takes her place by the boat in the fish tank as per the pre-show, but this time the boat is sinking, sinking, until eventually the water turns black. A moving end to the first half.

The second half opens with string instruments and a haze in the air. This piece is by **Krish Mehta**, and in it we see another arguing council. There are those who are convinced that the haze is a hoax (the velvet-jacketed, smarmy, snake-like Charlie, played by **Jacob Lenton**, and the returning **Fi Lawrence-Pietroni** and **Oscar Peters**). We witness arguments, gas-lighting, and tempers-flaring, as shareholders are placed on equal importance with the planet's ecosystem, with an authoritative **Elijah Dix** as Jonathan Allard at the helm of it all. Rose Kallan (**Elinor Longley**) enters, finally presenting long-awaited proof that the haze is caused by fossil fuels. The writing is intriguing, the language mature, the performances strong. Our steady constant silent typist **Bella Bailey** eventually speaks up. No one is innocent. "Don't be sorry. Save us."

Punk rock, glissandos and guitars summon our activist Ash Robinson (**Indigo Perett**) back to stage as a University student intent on collecting litter and keeping it about her person, much to the initial disgust of her friend Lin (**Kushal Parmar**). She is flirty, friendly, outspoken. He is unsure, bookish, and at first stand-offish, until he is eventually brought onside with empathy and enthusiasm. We have a lovely moment meeting Taylor, a priggish, entitled student being disrupted by the protest (played very well by **Emilie Charbonneau**) and Professor "everybody just relax" **Joel Fleming**.

A real gear shift into our next scene, which is played in with quaint English melodies. We meet Susan and Scott, **Phoebe Preston** and **Zach Halliwell**, Grandmother and Grandson, battling the cross-generational divide and winning in a beautiful scene that starts with finding an appropriate gender-neutral name for a Chrysalis. Smart devices are set aside as conversation is translated across inter-generational language barriers, and both actors give a heart-warming performance.

**Rosie Nisbet's** final piece gives previously met characters a chance to come together at a dinner party. We see the bacon seaweed, the man-made virus proposal, Annie the mystery child (demystified as the daughter of Prosecutor and Photographer), and a little closure for each story (a difficult feat in an anthology piece such as this). We are also introduced to Danz (**Joel Fleming**) and his partner, previously met in the courtroom, played by **Anna Jobes**. They have a conversation about wedding planning and opposing ideas about having children, leaving us wanting to know more...

... and we are rewarded as the next scene kicks off to ominous piano music. We see a dramatic, moving, and fervent showdown between the two, who both act believable characters beyond their years. It's a conversation I've seen happen again and again amongst my friends but elevated to "fake news" vs "the world is ending" levels, ultimately ending in a heart-breaking embrace as they hold each other and say, "I love you and I don't know what to do".

We end as we began, with full company swarming the stage in a giddy, dizzying circle around Annie before stopping to deliver their call to arms. It's rousing and inspiring: It starts with me. It starts with you. It starts with us.

**22/12/22**