

# YOUNG

The Best Youth-Oriented Drama

The Picture of Dorian Grey, Sydney Theatre Company

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I had to squeeze past the plethora of eager theatregoers, filling up the long aisle of seats, to get to my own. When I sat down, I was immediately intrigued by the stage. In the centre, one large rectangle hung from the ceiling, and nothing more. No set pieces, no backdrop, and apart from the barely visible tape markings laid out on the floor, no given idea about what this unique production had in store for us. The chatter died, the lights dimmed, the performance began, and for the next 2 hours, I basked in a display of an inventive, incessantly entertaining and enthralling showcase of artistic storytelling and character expression through utilisation of technology. The Picture of Dorian Grey is a masterful symphony that utilises the role and pathos of an orchestra populated by only one member.

The Picture of Dorian Grey by 19<sup>th</sup> century playwright **Oscar Wilde**, is a story about self-image, the morality of beauty, and influence, which goes unaltered by Director **Kip Williams** in his contemporised adaptation of the young socialite's Faustian rise

to infamy and decent into tragic madness. Dorian's humble beginnings of naivety and innocence commence the narrative. His close friend and a brilliant painter, Basil Hallward unwillingly introduces Dorian to Lord Henry, whose hedonistic worldview influences Dorian to make a nonsensical, spur-of-the-moment, 'mad wish' of selling his soul to stay young forever, and for only Basil's recent Portrait of him to age. This desire is met, becoming the catalyst for the series of events that would ensue. Dorian soon becomes a malleable mind for Lord Henry to subject his views and ethics to, which gradually erases Dorian's innocence, and embraces his sinful and socially powerful life, till he cannot bear the guilt and burden of it anymore, destroying the now-aged and repulsively hideous painting, killing him in the process.

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In this performance, all 26 characters, male or female, poor or wealthy, good or bad, are played by **Eryn Jean Norvill**, who is the only performer in the production. To be frank, she is an absolute powerhouse in all aspects of her routine, effortlessly and confidently portraying this wide variety of iconic characters and expressing powerful emotive response, to a height that would seem impossible to reach for a solo performance. Personally, the lightning-fast costume changes are what impresses me the most, as when she and the crew transform her into another character, she also effectively changes her demeanour and physicality in correspondence. This along with the decision for one performer to play all parts from **Kip Williams**, who adapted the original novel to what we have today, just confirms that he's a bloody madman!

The tricky and intricately challenging task of playing all characters is eased by **Williams'** gradual expansion of the production's technical scope, with the most prominent one in the performance, the multi-cam. This aspect is what I believe was the least expected, but most engaging part of the performance, along with **Norvill's** evident ability to respond and create a physical and perspective-based relationship. This can be seen when two characters are interacting with each other. A pre-

recorded video of one character is superimposed with the other, usually played live by **Norvill**. When displayed to the audience, these choreographed character interactions are so realistic, they become surreal, which I believe **Williams** strived for. In a 2019 Sydney Theatre Company Q&A, he states,

‘I started using live video in my 2015 production of Suddenly Last Summer, which used video to unpack the idea of truth and perspective. I returned to it ...looking at the way that imagery can be used to construct power and self-obsession’.

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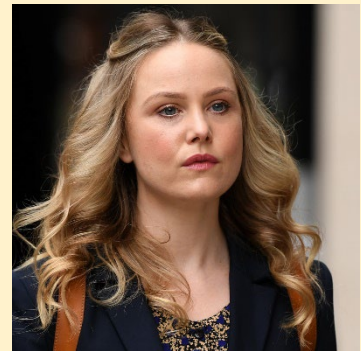


**Director and  
Adaptor**

Kip Williams

**Performer**

Eryn Jean Norvill



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The uses of technology implemented in this Production highlight and exaggerate techniques of theatre. The practice of Physicality is now not only up to the performer, but for the many camera operators and various crew member who's job is to follow **Norvill** and the character she is portraying around the stage, whilst the large screens that display the subject also contribute to the world-building of the production through digitally overlaid set pieces that intersect with the expertly designed physical props and sets. These digital devices allow a better understanding for the viewer. A particularly great scene I can recall where this is evident is during Dorian's full subjection to self-image and glamour whilst basking in the portrait's 'gift' of everlasting beauty. **Eryn Jean Norvill** gives a powerful internal monologue to the audience, whilst using an iPhone to digitally mould a photo of herself into a monstrous embodiment of what Dorian now think of beauty as, which audience members now can comprehend through this visual portrayal.

The experience of this performance was impeccable, but there was one thing that bugged me personally. The issue I came across was the trendy and internet humour attempted, where some joke referring to a current trend or something that only a certain demographic/group would get. 'Tweet than, Elon!' and 'Sorry Bill Gates!' are the main culprits of these jokes that are purely for a cheap laugh. Funny thing is, By the time you read this review, that'll probably be old news. In the after-show Q&A, **Eryn** did mention that a lot of those jokes are made up on the spot and sometimes improvised before the show, but still, compared to some of the more thought out and smartly executed gags, they just become dated and jarring.

Overall, The Picture of Dorian Grey is an expertly crafted production that takes you on a wild ride of joy, tension, heartbreak, greed, guilt and conviction which never ceases to amaze in the presence of a highly talented cast and crew. Now, before I go, here's something to think about when you see this play. We never see Dorian's painting, the camera's it it's place, right? Maybe, the Audience is the painting, and we absorb the sin of Dorian as we see him on stage! Something to think about...



#### Bibliography:

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