

THE BOYS ON THE BUS

by Jamie Hornsby

Commissioned by Jopuka Productions

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Boys on the Bus was commissioned as a sister show to *because there was fire*, my first play for Jopuka Productions. If *because there was fire* was about teenagers running away to the outback to escape the mundanity of their suburb, *The Boys on the Bus* is about the ones who stay behind. Together, they form the first two parts of what will become *The Shitsville Trilogy*. More on that soon.

This is an unapologetically swearsy play, filled with unapologetically swearsy characters. They're sometimes brutish and badly behaved. They can be crude and cruel. But I hope despite that, we can still find some common ground and empathise with them. They've got a lot of growing up to do. But they're a lot more complex than they might at first appear.

Scene titles have been left in to more easily break up the text, but the play should flow very fluidly, never stopping for a scene change. Keep the pace up.

Don't feel too obligated to portray the settings literally. It's more important for the play to flow smoothly than to bring on a literal bed, or couch, or (god forbid) a bus.

In group scenes (on the bus, for example), the characters should be free to drift in and out of the conversation, and to engage in their own (silent) mini-conversations when not active in a scene.

At a few points in the show characters embark upon long, rambling monologues (usually SAFFRON) - you don't need to adhere too strictly to the lack of punctuation and the long, rambling sentences. Take them instead as a clue to the building momentum and intensity of the speech.

NOTES ON TEXT

[] Lines encompassed by square brackets should be treated as direct address, and spoken directly to the audience.

SHIFT Denotes an abrupt shift in space or time.

CHARACTERS

MAX, M, 16-17, wants to be an artist. Sensitive, but can't show it to his mates. Queer.

SAFFRON, F, 19, Max's older sister. Funky and directionless. Prone to long rambling monologues.

JASON, M, 17, the de-facto leader of the group. Cocky, but thin-skinned. An embellisher.

CORK, M, 17, a pessimist with scathing wit. Jason's right hand man. Deeply conflicted.

GEMMA, F, 19, a bit of a stoner. Has just moved down from the city.

- Also plays MUM'S VOICE

ZARA, F, 18, endlessly sarcastic. Begins dating Jason, mostly for something to do.

- Also plays one of the FIGURES

TODD, M, 17, the rich-ish one. The butt of most jokes.

NATE, M, 17, a bit of a meathead, but perhaps with a sensitive side lurking deep below the surface.

ELISE, F, 17, trying her best, but tends to annoy everyone she comes into contact with.

- Also plays the CUSTOMER
- Also plays one of the FIGURES

ALYSHA, F, 16, a DnD obsessive. Big-hearted and consistently ignored.

- Also plays the POLICEWOMAN
- Also plays one of the FIGURES

BRETT, M, 25, a weird gross dude from Zara's work. Or is he?

- Also plays POLICEMAN
- Also plays DRESSING GOWN MAN

SWIMMER, M, 19, beautiful and enigmatic. Steely blue eyes, with darkness lurking underneath.

All performers except MAX may double as other ancillary roles where required.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Boys on the Bus premiered on Darkinjung land at the Launch Pad, Tuggerah on the 20th April, 2023. The original production was commissioned and presented by Jopuka Productions.

The cast and creative team were as follows:

MAX	Max Lindhardt-Ward
SAFFRON	Kyra Kent
JASON	Samuel Saifiti
CORK	Kani Lukuta
GEMMA	Brooke Shorten
ZARA	Amani Halak
TODD	Xander Rush
NATE	Chris Eadie
ELISE	Lucinda Ford
ALYSHA	Jennifer Grant
BRETT	Calem Madden
SWIMMER	Jacob Bloor
Other Roles/Covers	Eden Ormsby Tayah Blackman
Director/Designer	Joshua Maxwell
Dramaturg	Danielle Brame Whiting
Assistant Director	Abby Muddle
Emerging Director	Khy Elliott
Welfare Officer	Kelly Maxwell

The production was made possible by the NSW Department of Regional Youth.

PROLOGUE

The back few rows of a shitty old bus. We're mid conversation. TODD, CORK and JASON sit in the back row, sprawled out. NATE sits nearby, picking at the frayed, loose upholstery of a bus seat and chiming into conversation every now and then. MAX stares out the window.

TODD: Oi nah, I'm telling you, she was frothing it.

CORK: She was not.

TODD: I'm telling you, she was.

CORK: She absolutely was not.

TODD: Were you there?

CORK: Why would I have been there?

TODD: Exactly. So you don't know, do you?

CORK: I know you, bro.

JASON: Let him tell his story.

CORK: I am.

JASON: You're not.

TODD: You're absolutely not.

CORK: I fuckin' am, Jesus!

JASON: Constant fucking interruptions.

CORK: Did anyone ask you?

JASON: I want to hear the story, shut the fuck up.

TODD: Anyway, *as I was saying*, she's wrapped around my little finger at this point.

CORK: *Very* little.

JASON: Shut up, Cork.

NATE: Yeah, shut up, Cork.

CORK: Who asked you, bro?

TODD: Anyway, she's leaning in real close, and I can feel her breath on my skin, and the front of her top's starting to droop down a little -

ALL: Oh come on/Fuck off/You pervert (etc)

TODD: - BUT I don't look, coz I'm a gentleman.

JASON: Sure you are.

TODD: And she's looking at the pictures and she says "I'd like to try that one." And I say "Careful. It's strenuous." And she looks me dead in the eye, I shit you not, and she's like "I like it strenuous. Is it *hard*?" And I'm like... "Yeah, it's pretty hard... It'll last you all night." She's all "That's what I like to hear" and I'm like "yeah I bet it is" and she's, like, fanning herself with her hand -

CORK: This is fuckin' ridic-

ALL: Shut up Cork.

TODD: And she's like "maybe you can come help me with it sometime" and I'm like "yeah... Yeah, I'd like that." And our eyes meet for a moment...

And, long story short, that's how I sold Zoe Spencer a jigsaw puzzle.

The boys erupt with laughter. CORK rolls his eyes.

CORK: What a stupid story.

TODD: I haven't even told you the best part. She comes back in the next day and she's all "I finished it already. You should pick out another one for me", then she *winks at me* and walks away. And I open the box and inside there's all the jigsaw pieces, but she's written her number on the back of them. So I spend the rest of my shift putting them back together and -

JASON: Wait, her number?

TODD: Yeah.

JASON: Who gives out phone numbers anymore?

TODD: Mia Spencer does, I guess. Anyway, I'm -

NATE: Why doesn't she just Facebook you?

JASON: Instagram.

NATE: Snapchat.

JASON: WeChat.

NATE: WhatsApp.

CORK: Guys, she's not gonna snapchat-wechat-whatsapp him because it didn't fucking happen.

TODD: Are you gonna let me tell my story or not?

CORK: Not if you're gonna keep wasting our time with this bullshit -

NATE: It's a pretty stupid story, Todd.
TODD: Oh, I didn't realise the fuckin' story police were on the bus today, Jesus -
MAX: Hey, guys.
CORK: You're such a fuckin' liar.
MAX: Guys.
TODD: Why are you on my case today, man?
MAX: Guys. Look.
Is that Dickhead's house?

Something in MAX's tone gets their attention and they all turn to look out the window.

NATE: No -
JASON: Fucking -
TODD: Way.

A stunned moment.

MAX: Someone's set Dickhead's house on fire.

SHIFT.

SCHOOL DAY

(Several more people appear - perhaps at the front of the bus.)

ELISE: Oh my God.
ZARA: Oh my God.
ALYSHA: Oh my God.

*The bus arrives at the school and the boys disembark.
MAX steps forward into the spotlight. He speaks directly to us.*

MAX: [People can't believe their eyes. Dickhead's the science teacher. Universally hated. I'm sure a lot of people have *thought* about setting his house on fire before. But no one's actually gone and done it.]

[It's the only thing anyone's talking about as we arrive at school.]

ELISE: Did you see? Did you see?

ZARA: Yes, of course I saw, I was on the same bus as you.

MAX: [Everyone's got a theory of some kind.]

ALYSHA: I reckon it was Switchblade Angus from the year above us.

ELISE: No, dude, it's totally the French teacher who got fired for selling weed in the toilets.

ZARA: You're both wrong. It's simple. Dickhead finally got caught fiddling a student. The parent found out. Burnt down his house.

ALYSHA: Those are just rumours.

ZARA: I don't know... Mia Spencer swears she saw him take an upskirt photo in Chemistry once.

ELISE: But that's just a rumour... right?

ZARA: I'm just saying. Where there's smoke there's fire. Literally.

MAX: [Jason takes credit, of course.]

JASON: Look, I'm not saying it was *me*. But I'm not saying it wasn't me either.

*MAX stands slightly apart from the other boys.
Introduces us to the group.*

MAX: [Jason moved here when we were in Year 4. Quickly became the leader of the group.]

JASON: Sometimes people have it coming to them, don't they? Sometimes people get what they deserve.

MAX: [He used to do this thing where he'd go around the courtyard asking for coin donations for orphans in Cambodia or otters with lung cancer, or whatever other charity he could think of, and then he'd use the money to shout us chips from the canteen. He's always had a silver tongue.]

CORK: You didn't set his house on fire, dude.

JASON: Do you know that? Do you really know that?

CORK: Yes.

JASON: Do you *reaaaally*-

CORK: Yes. Fucking obviously.

MAX: [That's Cork. He's called that coz when we were in Year 8 he and Jason stole a bottle of champagne from some fundraiser for the rotary club three suburbs over. Jase was trying to open it and the cork exploded out of the bottle and hit Cork in the balls. The name just kinda stuck.]

TODD: Oi, but whoever *did* do it though...? Absolute fucking legend.

MAX: [That's Todd. He's the rich one. Well, rich compared to anyone else here. He lives in the new housing block just up the hill. *He's* never shouted us chips

from the canteen.]

TODD: Like, complete fucking mad lad. Good on him.

CORK: There's no mad lad here, shit for brains. It's summer. It's fire season. Dickhead probably just left too much shit plugged into the one powerboard.

TODD: Whatever, man.

NATE: Hey, did anyone do the Maths homework?

The boys look at each other. No one's done it. They all look toward MAX.

MAX: Yeah, it's in my bag.

BOYS: Fuckin' legend/thanks mate/Good old Maxi-pad (etc)

During MAX's next speech NATE unzips MAX's backpack and takes the homework out. The boys copy down the answers.

MAX: [The one unzipping my bag right now is Nate. He literally doesn't have a personality. Some people are just... *there*, I guess.]

[And me? I'm Max.]

[I'm just kind of... *there* as well.]

The bell rings.

SHIFT.

We're in a classroom.

[Maths first. Aircon's broken again and it's sweltering. Maybe if I pass out from heatstroke I can get out of History later.]

[Mr. Moorhouse sits at the front. The others call him Donut Cunt coz of his receding hairline. Bald on top, furry on the sides, you know?]

[He gets up and without a word taps the tray on his desk. Homework due.]

MAX reaches into his bag. There's nothing there.

[Fucking Nate. He didn't put it back.]

[Look up. Moorhouse is walking down the aisle collecting everyone else's work. Fucksake. Think of an excuse. Cat died. No. Grandpa died? No, I used that one last year. Think. Think.]

[And just as he gets to me...]

NATE bursts in.

NATE: Sorry to interrupt, Donu- I mean, Mr. Moorhouse. There's, uh, there's a fight going on behind the science block. Think Angus might have brought a knife to school again.

NATE and MAX watch the unseen Mr. Moorhouse leave. NATE hands MAX's homework back.

MAX: You left that a bit late.

NATE: Oh, stop complaining, I brought it back, didn't I?

NATE winks and leaves.

MAX: [Moorhouse comes back in, shaking his head. Comes up to my desk and I hand him my homework. He just looks at me for a second and says...]

"It's within your power to find some better friends, you know."

The bell goes.

[Trying to ignore that as I walk across the yard to English. Who the fuck does he think he is? "Find better friends." What's wrong with these ones? Yeah, they're loud. And obnoxious. Yeah, they're dropkicks and deadshits and dumbasses. Yeah, none of us are, you know, going places. But who in this town is?]

[And it's not like I made the choice to be friends with them anyway. Just kind of fell into it one day. They were just there. We're all just... here.]

The bell goes.

[The bell goes. Day over. Wander past the toilet block so dirty you'd rather squat on the oval instead. Bump into one of the Year 12s smoking behind the canteen. Out the gate.]

[And there it is.]

The bus pulls up. MAX boards the bus. Heads to the back. The boys are all there.

JASON: You took your time.

Max looks at them for a moment.

MAX: [And there they are.]

The bus pulls away. Perhaps in the background we can hear the flames of Dickhead's house burning.

SHIFT.

PRINCESS PARTY (SAFFRON LONGS FOR DEATH)

SAFFRON enters, dressed in a knock-off Disney Princess dress. She's working at a

children's party.

SAFFRON: *(singing)* LET'S ALL SPARKLE
LET'S ALL SHINE
LET'S BE HAPPY
LET'S BE FINE
LET'S BE SILLY
LET'S HAVE FUN
NOW THE SPARKLE
HAS BEGUN!

Come on, kids! Let's do the sparkle!

*SAFFRON does the Sparkle, whatever that means.
Probably a series of elaborate yet daggy dance moves.
Perhaps she gets the audience to join in.*

SPARKLE TO THE LEFT
SPARKLE TO THE RIGHT
SPARKLE TO THE FRONT
AND SPARKLE TO THE SIDE
SPARKLE WITH YOUR HEAD
SPARKLE WITH YOUR TOES
SPARKLE ALL DAY LONG

Wow, great sparkling, everybody! I'm Princess Annabelle and everyone wish a hippity-hoppity-happy birthday to Toby!

She speaks to an unseen parent.

Sorry, what?

Toadie? Like in Neighbours?

You named him after Toadie from Neighbours?

A small pause as SAFFRON reassesses her life choices.

Everyone wish a hippity-hoppity-happy birthday to Toadie! Yayyyy!

SHIFT.

Later. SAFFRON slouches, smoking cigarettes with two other party princesses, GEMMA and ELISE. ELISE sits a little further away than the other two. They all still wear their princess dresses, but their tiaras have been discarded.

SAFFRON: I fuckin' hate this job.

ELISE: *(trying to join in the conversation)* Me too.

SAFFRON: I mean, who names their kid after a fuckin' sex offender from a soap opera?

ELISE: *(quietly)* Toadie's not a sex offender...

GEMMA: Could be worse. I did one last week for some little blonde haired shit called Khaleesi.

SAFFRON: But still, the fuckhead from Neighbours?

ELISE: *(quietly)* I like Neighbours...

GEMMA: ...Isn't your name Saffron?

A beat.

SAFFRON: Yeah, but my name's cool.

GEMMA: Uh huh.

A beat.

SAFFRON: What's, uh... what's yours?

ELISE: Mine?

SAFFRON: No, Elise, obviously I know your fucking name. We've gone to the same school since Year 2.

ELISE: Well, that's why I was confused.

GEMMA watches all of this, amused.

GEMMA: I'm Gemma.

GEMMA reaches her hand out. SAFFRON shakes it, slightly awkwardly.

SAFFRON: Saffron.

GEMMA: Yeah, I know... I was reaching for another smoke.

SAFFRON lets go of GEMMA's hand.

SAFFRON: Fuck. Right. Sorry.

*SAFFRON hands GEMMA the cigarette packet.
GEMMA smirks.*

GEMMA: But nice to meet you.

SAFFRON: You too.

Slight pause.

GEMMA: We should get out of here.

SAFFRON: What, you wanna, like, hang out? Yeah. Yeah, cool. Sure.

SAFFRON cringes at herself.

GEMMA: No, I mean, the boss is coming this way.

SAFFRON looks behind her.

SAFFRON: Shit! Audrey?

GEMMA: Yup.

SAFFRON: Fuck, grab your shit, we gotta go.

SAFFRON picks up the tiaras and hands them to the others.

GEMMA: *(smirking)* But glad you're so keen to hang.

SAFFRON: Oh, shut up. Follow me. We can cut behind the servo.

GEMMA: After you.

SAFFRON and GEMMA start to leave.

ELISE: I'm coming too! Last time she caught us smoking she called my mum and I got grounded for a week.

SAFFRON: Fine, whatever, just move it.

SHIFT.

Later. SAFFRON and GEMMA are alone.

SAFFRON: I think we lost her.

GEMMA: Audrey?

SAFFRON: Elise.

GEMMA: Why're you trying to lose Elise? She seems all right.

SAFFRON: You try knowing her for ten years.

GEMMA: She can't be *that* bad.

SAFFRON: Ten. Years.

GEMMA: Fair enough.

SAFFRON's phone rings.

SAFFRON: Speak of the devil.

GEMMA: Just gonna let it go to voicemail?

SAFFRON: Nah, she'll call all day long until she gets an answer. Not annoying at all.

GEMMA: Noted.

SAFFRON answers the phone.

SAFFRON: What is it, Elise?

We can hear the muffled sound of someone yelling over the phone.

...Audrey. Hi. I thought this was Elise.

You're using her phone. Yes. Yes, I can hear that.

She said what? Smoking? In the dresses? No. No, we wouldn't do that.

You can smell it? Well, it's a smoky day. Are you sure you're not smelling that?

Elise told you it was us, did she?

SAFFRON raises an eyebrow at GEMMA.

(under her breath) I'm going to skin that fucking bitch alive.

No. No, nothing Audrey, I was just...

Yes I know it's a total fire ban, Audrey, that doesn't apply to cigarettes - well, I'm not going to burn down the neighbourhood with a single fuckin' cigarette, am I?

Wait, what do you mean, Mr. Donaldson's house burnt down?

SAFFRON looks to GEMMA.

Dickhead's house burnt down?!

GEMMA: ...I don't know who that is.

SAFFRON: *(back to the phone)* Sorry. No. Yes. You're right.

The new girl?

SAFFRON looks to GEMMA.

No. She wasn't with us. She left early. It was just me and Elise. It was Elise's idea, actually. If you're going to dock anyone's pay, dock hers.

Yes. Yes. I'll wash the dresses. Yes, with Omo. Yes. OK. OK, see you Audrey. Have a sparkly night.

SAFFRON hangs up.

OK. New plan. We're going to egg Elise's house.

GEMMA: You covered for me. That was cool. Thanks.

SAFFRON: You're, uh... you're welcome.

A pause.

GEMMA: Wanna get high?

SHIFT.

SKETCHING/THE POOL

MAX: [One week since Dickhead's house burned down.]

[Rest of the week is pretty normal. It's only the second week of Year 11 and everyone's already sick of it. It's so fucking hot.]

CORK, in class, puts his hand up.

CORK: Sir? Sweatbox imprisonment's against the Geneva convention. It's torture, sir. That's what you're doing right now. Torture. I'll call a lawyer. I'll do it.

MAX: [Do the bare minimum to get through class and spend the rest of my time staring out the window. Or with my head buried in my sketchbook.]

Perhaps MAX shows us his sketchbook. Or perhaps the sketches are projected on the back wall.

Firstly, a tunnel under an overpass.

[This is the tunnel where they found those bodies a few years ago.]

Next, a cartoonish version of a champagne bottle exploding and hitting CORK in the balls.

[The day Cork got his name.]

Next, a house on fire.

[Dickhead's house burning down. It's all anyone's been talking about. May as well draw it.]

[School's out for the day. Go down to the pool. Don't get in or anything. Maybe dip my feet in a little bit. But mostly I just watch.]

MAX gets out his sketchbook.

[This pool's one of the only proper Olympic length ones within 50 k's. Leftover from the sixties when this was the newest, hottest suburb. They thought it was going to be a city centre. A metropolis. The land of opportunity. Well, look how that turned out. Good times and knife crimes, that's the motto of this place.]

[But despite all that, you get private school guys from the city getting the train out to slumsville just for this pool.]

MAX draws what he sees.

[They're graceful. I mean, not in real life. But in the water... they glide. Like they're made for it. Aerodynamically engineered to be... perfect. That's the only thing they are, in that moment. Perfect.]

Lights up on a SWIMMER.

[One of them stands up. Looks over towards me. His eyes are... so blue. Bluer than the pool. Bluer than the ocean. Bluer than the sky.]

[Shut my sketchbook. Worry that I've been caught. But no, he's just... looking at me.]

[He waves.]

The SWIMMER waves.

MAX looks around. There's no one else nearby.

[Waves again. Says something. I can't hear.]

MAX closes his sketchbook.

[Is he telling me to come over? Or telling me to fuck off?]

MAX pauses for a moment. Unsure.

[Best not to risk it. Stand up. Get out of here. Hear him say something as I'm near the exit. Turn back. He's still just... looking. In all that blue.]

[Think about that all the way home.]

SHIFT.

THE "INTERROGATION"

JASON, at work, wearing a tatty uniform. He's doing various bits of busy work, perhaps wiping a counter. Perhaps restocking shelves.

A CUSTOMER enters. They wear a hoodie.

JASON notices them looking around.

The CUSTOMER glances over their shoulder.

Then swipes a pair of thongs from the rack.

JASON notices this. Doesn't say anything.

JASON: Do you need a hand, ma'am?

CUSTOMER: Oh shit. No, I -

JASON: Let me show you over to the electronics section.

JASON takes the customer over to where the higher-value items are.

SHIFT.

JASON sits at a table, harsh spotlight on him. He's cocky. Doesn't seem worried.