



Manus. Pic supplied by Adelaide Festival. Photo: Mohammad Sadeq Zarjouyan

## FESTIVAL

# Adelaide Festival 2019 review: Manus

Jennifer Hullick, The Advertiser

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## Manus

Theatre / Iran

Main Theatre, AC Arts

Until March 10

Just like the asylum seekers imprisoned on this benighted Papua and New Guinean island, you cannot walk out of *Manus* unchanged by what you have witnessed.

This powerfully evocative piece of theatre is presented by eight members of an Iranian theatre company speaking the words of real refugees interviewed as they wait in limbo on Manus and Nauru.

The aching torment of their lives since fleeing their homeland is spoken in the often poetic yet unrelenting Persian language of Farsi, with subtitles above the stage.

The simple staging uses little more than jerry cans for everything from seating to musical instruments, with water falling on to the stage to conjure the island's ceaseless heat and humidity.

Occasional, well-chosen video clips of Australian politicians and scenes from Manus are projected onto the actors to fulfil their roles as human canvas for the story.

And through it all comes the unremitting messages of outrage, heartbreak, bewilderment and perhaps most distressingly, a loss of hope among these people, who have remained confined for years in third-world conditions created by Australia's offshore detention policy.

The tension is rarely at anything less than breaking point as the characters relate tales of flight into mortal danger in the seas north of Australia, their imprisonment in the detention camps, leading up to the riot that ended with the brutal murder of a gentle giant.

The final image of a three-year-old Syrian boy lying drowned on a Turkish beach sums up the horrifying human toll.

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You won't leave the theatre unchanged, but nor should you.

— Jennifer Hullick

