

'A smart and snappy exploration of sex, lust and politics'

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3.5 stars

Scenes flash, leapfrog, repeat, and segue into one another in Jordan Seavey's *Homos*, or *Everyone in America*. A chronological puzzle set in Brooklyn between 2006 and 2011 – a period where the legalisation of same-sex marriage swept across the States – director Alex Kendall Robson deftly builds the complex love story of a non-practising Jewish writer and a black academic.

In a wine bar, hospital, bath bomb store and the academic's apartment (a bed is the stage's centrepiece), their relationship is put through the wringer of politics, personhood and lust. Not always knowing where we are in the timeline, or the significance of a scene, we see them trying to figure out how to live as a couple, and how to balance this with the pressures of community, history, progress and their individual desires.

Language becomes a means to test each other's evolution as young men in their supposed "post-gay fantasia". "Strapping Dan", a centurion-like Axel Berecry, is their other major test.

It's structurally impressive with a smart, snappy script. But (spoiler alert), as my fellow theatregoers groaned afterwards: "Does a hate crime really need to be the precondition for a gay couple getting together"? As though trauma-bonding is the only guarantee for enduring queer relationships.

From a 2024 perspective, the play isn't always imaginative in its deployment of gay lifestyle tropes and clichés – poppers, cocaine, non-monogamy – even if it deconstructs them in the lovers' endless debates. Their passionate arguments inevitably turn into the kind of passion that has them strip to their Calvins, which at times feels like the grammar of desire is used too glibly.

However, all this is easy to overlook with leads as animated as Edward O'Leary and Reuben Solomon. While they're better at doing snappy and jealous over seductive and tender, the pair breathe empathy and life into their characters.

Written in 2016, this is the Australian premiere of *Homos*, and presented as part of the Sydney Mardi Gras festival. It's no task to appreciate references to closeted US mayor Ed Koch, Reagan-era politics or the boroughs of New York. But it does make you wish for an equivalent that spoke more to its current audience – *Homos*, or *Everyone in Australia*, maybe.