

# A is for Atlas: Voyage

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## Voyage

Reviewed by: [Anne-Marie Peard](#) [Follow @SometimesMelb](#) on Friday 21 June 2013

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**Thomas Pender was 23 when he took his wife and baby on a dangerous 126-day sea voyage to Australia. People died on the way, they couldn't land in another country because for fear of disease and were quarantined on their arrival in Australia. A boat person arrives.**



*Voyage, Photo by Justin Batchelor*

In 1883, 23 year old Thomas Pender took his wife and baby on a dangerous 126-day sea voyage from England to Australia. People died on the way, on a detour to South Africa for food, they weren't allowed to leave the boat for fear of disease, and on arrival in Sydney they were quarantined for two weeks to ensure the on-board fevers were kept on board. A forefather arrives.

Pender kept a diary of those 126 days. His hand writing is immaculate and precise. His diary is still with us and his great great granddaughter, director Tamara Searle, has made exquisite theatre about their respective journeys through history.

The bare boards of fortyfivedownstairs seem like they were created to be the floor for *Voyage: The Actual and Properly Truthful Account of the Emigration of Thomas Pender*. The performers use every part of the space like it was designed by them, and with only a few suitcases, trunks, costume props and an overhead projector, they create a journey that's as fearful, hopeful, claustrophobic and agoraphobic as a sea journey to the other side of the world can be. And the overhead projector is used in ways that create more emotion and atmosphere than any of the squillion dollar effects currently seen in Melbourne's bigger theatres.

The ensemble (Steve Brown, Kate Parkins, Shannon Quinn, Jon Richards, Brook Sykes and Leone White) begin by addressing the performers' expectations of the audience and the audience's expectations of the work (yes, I always wonder if anyone is going to take their clothes off and if I'm sitting next to that person's mum). This gently and delightfully brings the audience into the space, lets us get to know the performers, and ensures that their collaboration is as much of the story as Pender's diary. Then, starting with Pender's diary, they play the on-board characters and themselves, while questioning their interpretation of the writing and discussing the truth and fiction of facts.

If we were born here, most of us are a descendent of someone who came to Australia from another country, and maybe if we made this kind of connection to their journey, we'd welcome any and everyone who hopes to escape something by joining us here.

But, as we wonder is Searle's great great grandfather would recognise his own story, this work never screams or even articulates its underlying message. It's much more complex than that and its exploration is theatrical, mesmerising and human.

*Voyage* is one of the most beautiful and unexpectedly moving works I've seen this year. Its story is so personal for the director, but told in way that ensures that it's our story, no matter when or how we came to Australia.

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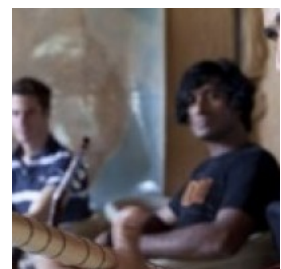
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