

# The bush bard reincarnated

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## THEATRE

By BERWYN LEWIS

The Bastard From The Bush  
By Rodney Fisher and Robin Ramsay  
Henry Lawson ..... Robin Ramsay  
Director ..... Rodney Fisher  
Seymour Theatre Centre.  
May 25 to June 4.

ROBIN RAMSAY as Lawson is rivetting. Against the stark and simple set, in braces and shirt, Ramsay recreates the times, writings and atmosphere of Lawson's landscape, from childhood to his final drifting apart.

With elegant dexterity Ramsay dips into a series of subtle images — romantic, rough-necked, passionate and frustrated.

He haunts the audience with snatches from the Gulgong gold rushes, the galvanised iron roof-tops, the bark huts, the stifling classrooms of Lawson's childhood, complete with goannas scuttling across the rafters.

Donning his digger's hat and soft jacket Ramsay recalls Lawson's sleepy pub verandahs, his meagre intellectual diet (Edgar Alan Poe and Dickens). He strokes the lonely Lawson to life, his aching for company, his stretching it out alone in bush cottages, pacing lonely tracks across Apple Tree flats.

With rich and evocative tones Ramsay reproduces the gentle tones and humour of Lawson's "voice," contrast-

ing it with the brooding, careless and disconnected man adrift in the outback landscape he loved and loved to deride.

Lawson's relationship with Mary, his wife, is ambiguous and lightly touched upon. Her leaving him comes as an abrupt and puzzling point.

However his relationship with Mrs Spicer, sugar bags slung across her capable bush shoulders, displays Lawson's true admiration for all strong, colourful and humorous bush people.

The anecdote about "Giraffe," a touching tale about an inveterate collector of donations to help the poor and needy, reveals Lawson as an incurable softie and romantic.

Ramsay faithfully and lovingly reproduces aspects of the Lawson character as well as characters from Lawson's poetry and prose.

At the drop of a spot or a change of lighting Ramsay makes the switches, fleshing out the Captain of The Push, sketching in a Eureka Stockade setting. Ramsay's virtuosity is undeniable as he sustains rapt audience attention.

He distills Lawson's evocative tones and words, establishing new layers of meaning, extending the significance of this rare bush poet.

His musings move from the bright life and laughter of streets and outback to the inside of black marias and jails. His dreams experience drought.

In the chill of early morning light in a jail Lawson is prompted to say: "I don't know about the value of my work." This superb production, with its fine direction, leaves absolutely no doubt about that.

