

Sydney
Festival
2025

WILLIAM YANG: MILESTONE



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WORLD PREMIERE

Roslyn Packer Theatre

10 & 11 January

1 hour, 35 minutes (no interval)

CAST AND CREDITS

Creator/Performer/Co-director William Yang

Composer/Pianist Elena Kats-Chernin

Co-orchestrator Lyle Chan

Dramaturg/Co-director Tessa Leong

Conductor Simon Bruckard

Production Manager Neil Simpson, Aiden Brennan

Technical Director Daniel Herten

Lighting Designer/Operator Sammy Read

Producer Fenn Gordon for Tandem

Auspiced by Performance Space

ABOUT THE SHOW

Milestone is my memoir. It begins when I first realised that being Chinese in Australia in the 50s is “like a terrible curse”, and later in my teens I realised that I was homosexual, so I thought I had been inflicted with a double curse.

When I came to Sydney in the late 60s, I was able to come out as a gay man and I met the artistic set of the counterculture movement with which I identified. I became a freelance photographer and I documented my life in the heady days of gay liberation in the 70s. In the 80s I claimed my Chinese heritage which hitherto had been denied and unacknowledged, so I researched the Chinese in Australia and I begin to tell family stories. In so doing I invented a unique form of performance in the theatre, using spoken word, slide projection and music. These works were very successful and in the 90s and 2000s and I travelled the world touring my performance pieces. I tell my own story. *Milestone* is about becoming myself.

A NOTE FROM THE CREATOR

My performance pieces involve me talking with slide projection and music. I started off with recorded music but evolved to live music, usually with the composer playing live on stage. I realised there was always me and the slides, but for variation I could change the music by working with different composers. When Asia TOPA and Sydney Festival proposed a piece working with a symphony orchestra, I was excited to do something big – and I thought of my life story. I’ve told parts of this story in other pieces since I’ve created over 14 works in total. Although the stories were personal, I’d never told a story just about me, so my first challenge was to have the confidence to do that.

I was helped by Tessa Leong, the co-director, as she interrogated the piece more thoroughly than any of my other pieces, which I worked on by myself. I’d worked with Elena Kats-Chernin before, and I describe her as a conduit to the universe of sound. She can somehow interpret images, instantly, into music. I like classical music and we had a great deal of fun working together, and that’s how art should be, joyful, even though the themes (death and family) are serious.

– William Yang

WILLIAM YANG

William Yang is an iconic Australian creator, principally known as a photographer, who integrated this practice with writing, performance and film.

“In the 1980s, I photographed the artistic, social scene in Sydney, then I explored my Chinese heritage, and I started performing monologues with slide projection and music in theatres in 1989. I’ve toured Australia and the world with shows such as *Sadness*, *Friends of Dorothy*, *The North*, *Blood Links* and *Shadows*. Most



William Yang



recently I created *Gay Sydney a Memoir* for Sydney WorldPride 2023. In 2021 I had a retrospective exhibition, *Seeing and Being Seen* at QAGOMA, Brisbane.

“I have worked with Fenn Gordon of Tandem, my producer, for nearly a couple of decades. Jeff Khan and Tam Nguyen, the Asia Topa commissioners have separately commissioned works of me before, as have Sydney Festival, and I have worked with Tessa Leong of Contemporary Asian Australian Performance before. Similarly, I have done a full-length piece with composer Elena Kats-Chernin before. Simon Bruckard, the conductor, was new to all of us but recommended by Sydney Festival.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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