

# Ned Kelly – My Love is Sensational

By **Mick Pacholli** - November 14, 2016



I arrived early to catch a few bands at the Retreat Hotel next door to the Metanoia Hall theatres in Sydney Road, Brunswick, such a vibrant pub and the courtyard is an Aussie dream!

I knew this area well when there was only Joe Gaulteri's Bombay Rock pumping out 'culture' but what a wonderful hub the Town Hall precinct has become. Metanoia Hall embellishes this unique position on Dawson Street and Sydney Road.

This is a musical like no other I have seen. I loved the simple bush setting on the stage and the lighting and wall projections set the mood and place for the tumultuous times that Ned and Ettie lived through.

We were early and fortunately so as we had the opportunity pre-show to chat to the great, great grandchild of Ettie Hart Paul O'Keefe who found the amazing trove of historical documents in a suitcase one hundred or so years after Ettie's death that had been stored unnoticed all those years and did the research to find out the truth connected to this Australian love story of some import.

To see, smell and touch Argus clippings from Ettie's scrap book of newspaper stories about Ned was something special for a publisher like myself and all the other pieces of original documentation Paul had unearthed during his research all appear to validate the story of Kelly Gang member Steve Hart's youngest sister Ettie's love for Ned.



Thing is though, if this story is true she was so staunch she only ever alluded to her true love...his name was never mentioned and the songs created from her discovered poetry and love letters will become legend. "Think of Me" is a stand out amongst all wonderful songs.

Xavier Brouwer has melded a potential masterpiece of Australian biography that will I believe find greater stages.

From the opening moments I was bolt upright in my seat and following the storyline intensely. It was fair dinkum yet the 3 main characters delivered the story in a tone that sat well on the ears, almost moreish, we know this sound of a true Ozzie twang, raw sophistication in the delivery that took us to the very place Ned or Ettie played out this amazing musical drama, it is the iconic love story of the time, so well portrayed, I cried twice involuntarily, such a joyously tragic revelry that proceeds under the guitar playing of the bard Luke MacDonald in the back of scenes, chasing and driving the theme, tying all the plot together in a seamless integrity of theatrical arts.

Caity Berwick was Ettie Hart; a sensational, smart and sombre interpretation of Etty, a true a true and powerful representation of the Irish women that carved our society since the first fleet, no fawn, rode a horse like a man they say, but in this story, we find ourselves bolt upright, at attention to the stage and the brilliant direction and stage management, lighting, etc. etc. is in perfect tune to the story with which we are swept away.

Ned Kelly was played by Christian Gillet in a most convincing manner extracting the legend of Kelly and putting him on stage for us, wonderfully acted and his voice alone, and with Caity, was fantastic also. Music seems to sit so well within this play intrinsically weaved and meshing the story together in such a subtle yet commanding way.

The evil Trapper Sergeant Steele was deliciously played by Emil Freund, a policeman with a vexatious hate for Ned and his family and a never to be realized want Ettie Hart's hand. This Master of the Hounds uses all his resources including spies to haunt Ettie's moves in his attempts to track Ned down. Emil's voice dripped with the nastiness and distemper of a man rejected by someone way out of his league.

It was a very short 4-day season for Ned Kelly My Love but this play will resonate long in the minds of those that experienced the production.

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Writer and Director: Xavier Brouwer

Researcher: Paul O'Keefe

Lighting Designer: Maddy Seach

Set and Costume Designer: Valentina Serebrennikova

Guitarist: Luke McDonald

Projection Designer: Jessica Rowland

Photographer: Michael Diakakis

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